# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

Issued Weekly

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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

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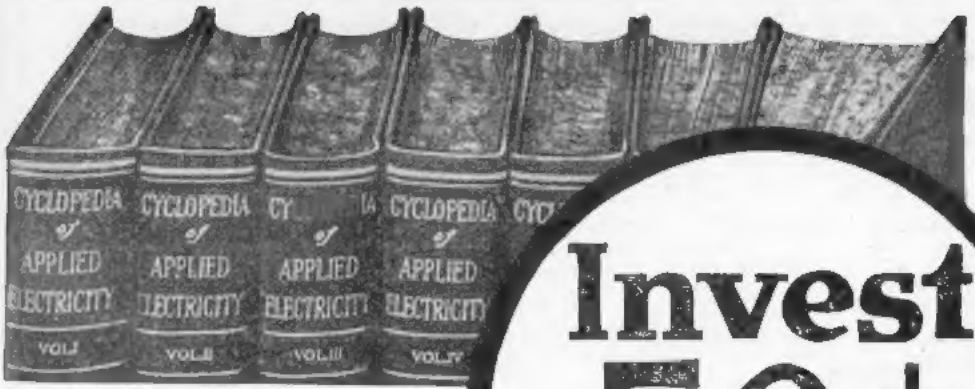


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280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 14, 1918.

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# WHO DARES?


BY LORING BRENT,

Author of "Peter the Brazen," "The Black-Sander," etc.


A SIX-PART STORY—PART ONE.

CHIEFLY because, in the excitement of that furious poker-game, he had very nearly forgotten that such a place as New York City existed, Jimmy Webb was one of the last to go down the steerage gangplank. And chiefly because Jimmy Webb was the sort of young man that people casually take a liking to, one of the score of customs inspectors singled him out, grinned hospitably, and saluted him after this fashion

"Hey, there, sonny! What's your initial?"

"My name is Webb," admitted Jimmy Webb suspiciously

"Right-o! I'll take a look at your stuff and let you get away ahead of some of these dudes traveling first-class."

"My what?" rejoined Jimmy, with a warming smile

"I said, your stuff--your baggage."

"Are you kidding me?"

The kindly-intentioned inspector said something under his breath, while the lines in his face straightened out, and his detectivelike eyes bored the steerage passenger with a look that might have been hostile, or might simply have been hurt

"Haven't you any baggage?"

"You flatter me," said Jimmy, in a grateful voice, moving slowly toward the telephone-booth.

Half-way to the glass-paneled door he stopped, turned around suddenly, and said:

"Much obliged, anyway, old scout. When you run across a red-bearded fellow named Sanderson, don't let him slide through with those three Panama hats stuffed in the upper lining of my grip. When you see an old scoundrel with a beard the color of ox-blood—the meanest-looking old ruffian this side of Valparaiso—well, that's him!"

"Poker Sanderson?" cried the customs man, edging closer.

"Five Aces Sanderson," replied Jimmy in tones of correction, "although I will confess that I never saw all five on the table at one time."

The inspector was interested, but Jimmy entered the booth, shut the folding-door, lodged his elbow firmly against it. Next moment his entire worldly wealth was slid-

ing into the nickel-slot of the pay-as-you-enter telephone mechanism

He called a number in a district familiarly known in New York as "the Heights," and shortly a sweet voice filtered to him over the wire

"Hello—dear!" exclaimed Jimmy Webb.

"Oh—ah –" and the sweet voice fal tered. It was like honey, that voice.

"Is that ." Pause.

"This is your darling son, James. Jimmy has just hit the village, from South America –"

"Oh, I see. Jimmy."

Her voice was one neither of surprise nor of delight, such as might have been expected of a mother who had not gazed upon her only child for nearly two years.

Indeed, there was a trace of disappointment in the voice, as if she might have been expecting a telephone call from another, perhaps one whom she held far dearer than Jimmy.

Yet the confession implied in the tone of the voice did not cause the slightest disfavor or puzzlement on the part of her high-humored son.

Their love had partaken of a peculiar devotion. She had brought James into the world when she was scarcely sixteen years old. Her marriage had been one of those hasty and little-pondered affairs, and it was said by many of her critics that Mrs. Webb, now that she was fair and forty, was the same light headed, irresponsible little thing she had been when Duncan Webb had wooed and married her, all in a very passionate fortnight.

Jimmy Webb loved his small and frivolous mother, perhaps because filial love exists in all men, and perhaps because she was so helpless, so pretty, and so utterly independable.

A drastic sorrow in the shape of the violent death of Duncan Webb had brought the mother and son together in a somewhat unusual bond. They believed that each understood the other perfectly

The violence of that death, together with some of the unspoken circumstances there of, had erased many of the subtler feelings which exist between normal mothers and normal sons. Self-sufficiency explained an attitude which might have been construed by an outsider as aloofness, perhaps incompatibility.

In a formal voice she was now inquiring into his well-being.

Had he been well? Had the altitude affected his lungs? Had he contracted consumption?

Had he made his fortune? Would he come up soon and see her?

"Yes. No. No. No. Certainly," said Jimmy by way of reply.

"My fortune just went into this telephone receiver. I will haunt the hotels until some bartender or other dear chum can be induced to part with subway fare."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Webb in horrified tones. "Are you are you "

"Am I broke?"

"Haven't you any money?" she quavered

"Not a *centavo*," said he briskly.

"But if it's going to take you long, James, I'm not sure whether I'll be here when you come. You see, I—I have an important appointment. I dare not miss it."

"Very good, mother," said Jimmy agreeably. "I will call you up before I start. Go-o-o-d-by!"

Now, the instant that Jimmy Webb came out of the stuffy little booth was such an important instant in the life history of that happy young adventurer –perhaps the most important instant in his career –that this point is perhaps the best at which to pause and briefly establish him.

Jimmy Webb was by profession a mining engineer. At heart he was an adventurer, a sort of vagabond, the result, perhaps, of his home training, which was not of the best.

That his brain was good, clear, and of the fast-working type was proved by the success which had everywhere met his efforts.

He had studied mining engineering in college, and unquestionably there was a good future for him in that calling. That statement should be qualified. There would have been a good future for him in mining engineering, if he had happened to have some sort of steadying influence at work upon him.

The fact remains that he never had had that sort of influence.

Give youth its choice, and youth will strike out at once for the open road, the bounding sea, the desert, the Yukon, and youth will sometimes pick companions not above criticism.

After a fashion, that is what happened in the case of Jimmy Webb. He struck off down the open road with the song of adventure in his heart and the light of romance in his eyes.

He learned about men and women, because some lied to him, and he found them out; some betrayed him, and he found them out; and some stole his money and lit out with it.

So that by the time he had reached the mature age of twenty-four he had gathered in more worldly wisdom than nine-tenths of the young men of his acquaintance who were guided rigidly by normal mothers and living fathers.

The poker-game in the steerage of the Panama liner, during which exciting recreation the red-bearded man, cuttingly referred to as Five Aces Sanderson, had relieved him of his two years' savings in Cerro de Pasco, together with his baggage, his cuff-links, and his Brazil diamond stick-pin.

That Jimmy was a willing-enough gambler to stake his entire bank-roll and his five suits of clothes, including underwear, socks, shirts, and shoes, provides an interesting sidelight upon the young vagabond's character.

And, strange to say, he had no regrets, and certainly no resentment directed against the red-bearded gamester.

Jimmy had suspected that Sanderson's game was crooked. Yet, when the gambler had downed his four perfectly good queens with four much more convincing aces, Jimmy had told himself that if Sanderson was cheating, he was a clever cheater, and therefore entitled to all he could wean from the pocketbooks of his less cunning brethren.

If Jimmy had found him out, that, of course, would have been a different tale entirely.

Jimmy might have hit Sanderson over the head with a fire-bucket or the three-legged stool he was sitting on, and that would have been the first man he had ever killed.

So far his escutcheon was clean—of dead men. And yet, far in the background of his brain there was malice toward one man, a man whose name was not Sanderson, a man who had never done Jimmy any direct personal harm.

Not that Jimmy was at all unwilling to attach to his blet the scalp of Five Aces Sanderson.

There was one Blackthorn—a dyed-in-the-wool enemy of Jimmy's, whom he yearned to assassinate. Blackthorn was in Leavenworth, serving time on a matter which had little in common with Jimmy's grievance. The only black spot in Jimmy's heart, therefore, was the one reserved for that creature, Blackthorn.

In other respects his heart was quite red, certainly a most capable member. Some of his dearest friends, down there in Cerro de Pasco, would vouch that he had a heart of sterling silver.

Other true friends confessed that he had a heart of iron. Others, who were friendly but critical—and these were kindly and tolerant, at that—declared that his heart was of brass.

But certainly no one had ever accused Jimmy of having a head of lead.

## II.

THERE are many ways to account for the unusual thing that happened to Jimmy Webb when he stepped out of the telephone-booth. Least of all of them is fate.

Perhaps it could be listed as an accident. Maybe it was his face, which was as bronzed as an Inca's, and far more pleasant to gaze upon—a sincere, strong face, which inspired confidence and begot friendship.

Or it may have been that his clothing was responsible, although Jimmy, even at a hasty glance, did not resemble a porter.

Yet he had never been one to worry overlong over a vanishing trouser-crease. He dressed to be comfortable. His shirt was of flannel, and any one who has ever traveled steerage from Lima to Panama, and from Christobal to New York knows that polishing one's boots until they shine is one of the things which isn't done.

Perhaps the chief points to bear in mind are that Jimmy's face inspired confidence and that his dress was rough.

Although the young woman, in her distress, might have made a mistake.

His first glimpse of her was gained when he stepped out of the telephone-booth and into the areaway between two long rows of initialed luggage-piles which inquisitive customs inspectors were rummaging through quite as brazenly as though they were burglars.

One of the inspectors—Jimmy's friend had just completed an investigation of her property, and was now bestowing his attentions upon two old ladies.

The young woman was quite alone, standing as if undetermined, with a large and heavy-looking suit-case on either side of her.

She was dressed simply in a blue traveling-suit, and her sailor straw hat was dark-red.

Eyes as black as coal and as bright as diamonds peered out from under the red brim, and these eyes dwelt curiously upon Jimmy's face.

Jimmy was interested, although he made no sign. He simply looked her over with a dispassionate and impersonal gaze, as young men who encounter pretty and obviously perplexed strangers have a perfect right to do.

There was no getting around the fact that the small stranger was pretty. That was a fact.

Her complexion was duskily inviting, and her lips were exceedingly red, but delicate and sensitive. One glance at the sensitive lips and the fine, small nose was sufficient to convince Jimmy that she was of a retiring nature.

He was prepared to pass on when she arrested him with a pout.

It was exactly as if she had been mentally weighing him, and had finally arrived at a satisfactory conclusion.

This circumstance alone was peculiar.

He had seen the young woman before; once, when he had come up from the steerage for a turn around the first-class deck, when a sarcastic first mate had ordered him back to the quarter in which he belonged.

During that walk around the sunny promenade-deck he had observed this same young woman, alone as now, standing pensively with her head reclining against one of the fat white davits which came through from the deck above.

She had hardly noticed him then, having accorded him a rather cool and superior glance from eyes to toes as he sauntered past.

Having been filled then with the deviltry of his expedition, he had grinned amiably, and oh! how the goddess of romance took flight!

Her proud little chin went up, and the corners of her sensitive little mouth went down, and Jimmy had trod away without his feelings having been hurt at all

A witness to that first meeting might have said that James was a calloused young man, without finer sensibilities, and that the girl's quick snub had not been severe enough.

As for Jimmy, he didn't care. Yet the picture of her had lingered.

Such mental photographs frequently did linger with Jimmy. It had been an appealing young face, one of the living white kind that are disturbing because of their elusiveness

Faces of that stamp often stand out vividly in the night, after they have flashed across your vision, perhaps under a street-light.

Something of restlessness, of despair, of indefinable sweetness, marks them as things of a mysterious current, vivid souls not frequently encountered in this commonplace world.

There is romance, mystery, and much troubling thought concerned with such infrequent visions.

The mental image of that elusive face, with the unsatisfied eyes burning out of it, did trouble Jimmy, until Five Aces Sanderson and his stacked deck removed all thoughts of else out of Jimmy's mind.

And now, as if he had summoned her back, like an unfinished dream, she stood before him, and, what is more vital, she was pouting as she gazed.

"Well!" confided Jimmy to himself as he paused.

She came up to him.

"I wonder if you will carry my grips," she said.

And that was their introduction—the introduction to the greatest adventure of Jimmy's adventurous career! "I wonder if you will carry my grips!"

She seemed to think that no explanation was necessary.

Jimmy had thought, not unnaturally, that she was coming to ask him some great favor, having satisfied herself, after he had undergone that searching glance, that he was not only a man of her kind but a man whose very face spelled confidence and reliability.

It was not very flattering, to be sure.

Apparently the look had not told her that he was a courtly gentleman—one of her kind—but that he was a porter, a baggage-carrier, quite as much beneath her consideration as the soles of her pretty, black shoes.

Such an attitude ought to have crushed his vanity, yet he thought he detected through and underneath that curt, business-like sentence an appeal of like to like, as though she might really be in some difficulty and was taking this prosaic and blunt means of finding out if he were really as valiant and as worthy as she had summed him up to be!

"I should be delighted!" cried Jimmy, seizing the suit-cases in his two hardened fists and finding that they were surprisingly light. "Where to, miss?" he added in the submissive tones of a hardened baggage-smasher.

"I have been trying to find a taxi," she explained, apropos of her own predicament and not of his chasing thoughts. "I expected some one to meet me. He—they—must have gone some place else."

"Oh, yes; a taxi!" he agreed, extricating that much from her musings, and secretly glad.

Certainly she would not have confessed to an ordinary baggage-carrier the intimate fact that her friends had missed her.

He now found himself looking forward to the pleasure with which he would receive her tip, and to the dignity with which he would refuse that same tip.

Outside the wharf he found a taxi, tossed the suit-cases inside, and held the door open with what he guessed to be the correct bearing of a well-trained footman.

Soft, white fingers fluttered upon his hand.

He glimpsed, in passing, the sheer silk of an exquisite ankle, then.

"Aren't you coming?"

She leaned out from her place in the dark-green depths, examining his eyes with surprise and doubt.

Had Jimmy been attired in a cutaway coat, a silk hat, and with a cane hung stylishly from one arm, he might have doubted the motives of this pretty stranger. Certainly she must see that he was little more than a tramp. However—

"Am I coming!" sang Jimmy, jumping in beside her and slamming the door.

He was instantly conscious of a number of things. She was drawing away from him as far as was possible. His heart was jumping as if he had had an injection of strychnin.

And his nose was agreeably assailed by a light and fragrant perfume, as sweet as many flowers and as alarming as a sudden drift of air from cool woods, exhaled by her.

It was a trying moment for Jimmy Webb.

Then the ancient engine gave vent to a spasm of snorts; a red and ugly face swung around from the driver's seat, and a whisky-scented voice wanted to know where to.

"Where to?" repeated Jimmy, for her benefit.

"Why—why, the Hotel Van Stettlin!" she gasped.

"Right!" shouted the red-faced one, and off they went.

Being a gentleman and a man of the world, to boot, Jimmy knew intuitively that to ask questions would mean prying into a matter which his fair companion would explain in full when the proper time arrived.

Being also a man of resource, as soon as his first blush of embarrassment subsided, he found his tongue, and one of the first important discoveries he made, in endeavoring to penetrate her personality, was that she was a girl who smiled rarely, and then only when a chord of genuine humor had been struck.

Such a discovery is likely to be disarming as well as disheartening. Jimmy might have subsided into a shell of grim silence, which would have been perfectly justified, and which would have forced her ere long to confess herself.

But Jimmy was not of that construction. He had tried a jest, a rather poor jest, and the jest had not won a smile. It had had something to do with the red-faced individual who drove the taxicab, and, as I say, she had not smiled.

As far as senses of humor are concerned, young women can be divided into two classes: those who smile, and those who do not smile when young men give forth quips of such nature as "It will be a nice day tomorrow if it doesn't rain!"

Having delivered himself of the pleasantry upon their chauffeur, and noting that his companion did not smile — only compressed her lovely lips and sniffed slightly in recognition of his attempt — Jimmy drew the conclusion that his new friend had a mind of her own, and that perhaps grimness was one of the outstanding features in her character.

It was natural of him to be stubborn in the face of this discovery. He found that he wanted her to smile, and, upon a second attempt, when he did draw forth the slightest curving of her lips in the faintest of appreciations, he discovered there and then that the most important object of his life was to draw more of those wonderful smiles to the lips of this cold, distant young woman

She continued to watch him as from a distance, speculating upon him, as if marveling that flesh and bones could have been compounded into such a peculiar being Mind you, I do not say that she did think that; but that was the impression she gave Jimmy.

She was looking upon him curiously, half-turning in the seat, with her great, dark eyes flitting from his eyes to his lips, weighing him and his remarks thoughtfully, as though he were discussing some momentous topic, and inclining her head slightly in an attitude of attentive and polite listening

And Jimmy talked—it was something of a gift, that fluent and commanding wordage of his. He talked of the officers of the ship they had just left. His characterization of the sarcastic first mate drew her lips apart in another rare smile.

He exhausted the ship, then Panama, for humorous purposes, and then, as her expression, so he imagined, had become more interested and less analytical, he started in on the copper-mines in Cerro de Pasco.

At this she spoke for the first time since they had been together in the rattling cab.

"You say you have just returned from Cerro de Pasco?"

She was watching him with a peculiar eagerness. The analytical look was entirely gone. She was quite wonderful with that cold, impersonal veneer removed.

"Why, yes," confessed Jimmy, surprised.

"Are you a graduate mining engineer?"

"I am Dartmouth."

"You have practised?"

"Two years in Cerro de Pasco," he reminded.

"Gold mining?"

"A year in Alaska—placer and sulfurous," he replied.

"Ah! Are you joking again? You are so young!"

Jimmy was twenty-four, and he would have been willing to bet—well, he would have been willing to bet the clothes on his back, as they comprised all the stakes he could muster for any gamble—that she was not a minute older than nineteen.

"I left Dartmouth when I was twenty," he explained coolly. "I doubled junior and sophomore."

"But do you know gold-mining?"

She was very eager now.

"Well, I admit I'm not a Gilchrist, but —suppose you try me out."

"Oh, I don't know anything about gold-mining!" she said quickly. "Only I was wondering—"

"Well?" asked Jimmy.

"I haven't made a mistake, have I?"

"People sometimes do," admitted Jimmy genially. "What one are you referring to, if I may ask?"

"You are James Webb, aren't you?"

It was Jimmy's turn to look cold, distant, and analytical now. Also astonished, shocked, and suspicious.

"If I am," he ventured, "who are—"

"It is of no importance," she stopped him quickly. "You are James Webb. I saw your name on the steerage-lists. Now, please tell me, are you the son of Duncan Webb, who was—who died?"

All of the fun went out of Jimmy's heart; that black spot was now on duty.

"You started to say that my father was killed. Didn't you?

"How did you know he was killed? Who are you?"

"I am afraid you are presuming, Mr. Webb," she rejoined coolly, sinking away from him, the eagerness gone again from her expression. "I said nothing about killing. I know only that your father died, and I hoped, when I saw your name on the steerage-list, that you were his son."

"Well, I am," he asserted somewhat roughly. "What about it?"

"I am afraid you are rude," she said quietly, looking stonily away from him and out of the window on her side.

Jimmy looked, too, and saw that rain was falling, that the sidewalks were glassy.

"I'm sorry," he said, but not contritely. "You're right, whoever you are. My father was killed. If you can—"

"I can do nothing," she said quickly. "I repeat, you jumped at a conclusion without being in any way justified. I started to say—"

She hesitated.

"You started to say—" encouraged Jimmy, sorry now for his haste.

"That if you are James Webb, and a mining engineer, I may be able to help you find a position—a very good one."

Jimmy was completely set back.

"But why should you go to all this trouble for me?" he demanded, and certainly that question was a perfectly fair one to ask.

"Why?" she repeated, bringing her eyes back to his face moodily and turning them away quickly again, as if frightened. "For certain reasons, which you must not ask me to tell, I am in a way under a debt to you."

"But I never saw you before—before that day on the deck," he protested.

"Nevertheless, I say that I feel under a debt to you. No," she added hastily, as he began to explore her eyes more deeply, "this is the first time you and I have ever met. I hoped some day to meet you.

"If I had money, I would give you all I could scrape together—every—every penny," she added passionately. "I cannot tell you why. And it is quite useless for you to ask."

"All right," said Jimmy philosophically, "I won't ask, if you feel that way about it."

"I do," she said firmly. "I want to say a word about this position. But perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps you already have plans."

"You're quite right," agreed Jimmy. "I am open to any reasonable inducement."

"I know that a career in the mining profession is sometimes hard," she replied. "I mean, there's very little money to be made at first. Perhaps three or four thousand a year."

"Or twenty-five hundred," corrected Jimmy.

"So that a position paying five thousand a year would really be a favor to you, would it not?"

"Indeed it would, Miss—Miss—" He hesitated, looked at her blankly, but she offered no assistance. "Well, it certainly would," he finished.

"And that is exactly why I am offering, or, rather, suggesting it. I feel, as I have said, under an obligation to you—a tremendous debt.

"You may write the address down. You will not see the president, but the manager, a Mr. Radcliff, Eugene Radcliff.

"It is the Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada, and the offices are in the Blakeworth Building, on Broadway, near Wall."

Jimmy was writing it down.

"Are you a stockholder?" he asked.

She shook her head, compressed her lips, and glanced out of the window again.

"What shall I say? What name shall I mention?

"If I were you," she replied coolly, "I would mention your own name."

"Not yours?"

"Why mine?"

"Isn't a personal introduction always better?"

"Not in this case. My name would mean nothing to Mr. Radcliff. You will simply stand or fall—on your own record, and—your gameness."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"As bad as what?"

"I mean," he explained softly, "is it crooked?"

"Perhaps it is. I can't say, not knowing. What I meant was that it would take you into a very dangerous neighborhood, where your life would be in peril constantly, where you would be watched—suspected—attacked—at night, perhaps, by men who would not stop to explain.

"For what? For the love of doing something of great good, if you wish. If you are such a man as I have dared to guess—"

She stopped suddenly, turning upon him almost viciously, and her eyes were blazing like clean-cut diamonds.

"Dare you?" she snapped.

"Who dares me?" said Jimmy softly.

"I!" she cried. "I dare you, James Webb!"

He smiled. "You're plenty," drawled Jimmy. "Who are you?"

## III.

She dropped her chin upon an ungloved white hand, and looked stonily into her lap.

Jimmy waited as patiently as he could, taking the liberty of studying her profile. He decided, after a moment of unrewarded scrutiny, that a large part of her charm lay, after all, upon the surface, and that only the smaller share reposed in her mystery.

He saw that her profile—forehead, nose, lips, and chin—consisted of delicate and wonderful curves. Nothing of sharpness was there.

And it was a cool, sweet face, hardened a little about the mouth—perhaps by experience. He could easily imagine that she was stubborn of disposition, repressed by training—and that only occasionally did passion arise and come to the surface, such as it had a moment ago.

The bursting climax to her intense eagerness had been not unlike an explosion of hot, red stars in a cool autumnal heaven

"Of course, if you really don't want to tell me—" Jimmy began.

"Oh, please, stop!" she interrupted, as if irritated

"But I may never see you again!" he protested

"Well, why *should* you see me again?" she asked calmly.

"Because I like you!" explained Jimmy amiably. "You're different from any girl I ever met before."

She sniffed. "That's *such* an old story."

So she *was* worldly wise!

"Nevertheless, I'm sincere about it," said Jimmy stiffly.

"Heaven knows—you may! The world isn't very large."

As a matter of fact, his brain was asking him, why did he want to see her again? The chances were, she was probably bluffing about the gold-mine, with something entirely different up her sleeve.

Well, why?

The taxicab had stopped. Through the drifting rain he made out the familiar incandescent glow of the Van Stettlin's canopied entrance, and he was guiltily conscious again that he was without funds, but he said carelessly enough.

"If you will let me have the money, I will pay the driver, and meet you in the lobby. Yes—I promise to ask no more questions."

The girl was fumbling in her pocketbook, holding it to the light.

He heard her gasp. Then she turned quickly upon him.

"It is not here!"

"What?"

"My money."

"Holy mackerel!" groaned Jimmy, with a sinking heart.

The motor was chugging softly. A doorman in red-and-gold livery held open the cab door, and he was bowing deferentially, fumbling about for the other suit-case. One was already on the sidewalk.

"What shall I do?" whispered the girl in a terrified voice.

"Go into the lobby," he whispered back. "Wait for me there."

He watched her scurrying through the rain and into the brightly lighted portico, where she became an indistinguishable part of the slowly moving supper crowd

The doorman was walking away with her suit-cases in the same direction.

Jimmy leaped to the sidewalk, unmindful of the chilling rain, and accosted the taxi-driver.

"Partner—" began Jimmy, clearing his throat.

"What's that?" snarled the driver.

"Listen here," said Jimmy contritely. "In the haste of leaving the steamer, I packed away all of my available currency in one of my trunks. Unfortunately, I have not a red cent in my possession. Nor have I a gold watch, a ring, a cuff-link, or any other similar collateral -"

"You mean to say -" choked the red-faced one. "You mean to say—"

"Exactly!" agreed Jimmy hopefully. "You have gone straight to the center of the difficulty. I am flatter than this sidewalk.

"Now"—he rested one foot confidently upon the running-board—"in a day or two, if you will let me have your name and address—"

"Why, you low-down bum, you!" shouted the red-face. "You floater, you! You damned—"

He choked for lack of expletives, and looked fiercely down the street.

"I'll call a cop!"

"Go ahead," urged Jimmy pleasantly. "I'm guilty on every count. But as one gentleman to another, I tell you I'll pay you—"

"You pup, what's the matter with that moll? She's got money."

"You're wrong," denied Jimmy. "She is also—like the sidewalk."

"I'll fix you!"

The red face disappeared, and Jimmy had a peculiar intuition that the owner thereof was seeking a weapon, and inasmuch as Jimmy had no especial desire at this particularly bright moment in his career to have his brains spilled upon the sidewalk, he did the only thing that was conceivable, namely, taking to his heels.

The Hotel Van Stettlin, he knew, had another entrance on the other side of the block, and he scuttled. There is no other name for the retreat he beat.

With head down, a real menace to passers-by, he raced to the corner, fearing each instant the blinding and black impact of a wrench or a mechanic's hammer at the base of his brain. It was his intention to elude the pursuit entirely.

Gaining Broadway, he circled the corner, slowed down to a more dignified trot, and entered the Van Stettlin by the entrance on the other side street.

He was conscious, as he entered the lobby, that eyes were fixed upon him, eyes that were superciliously curious, eyes which were fastened in the well-groomed heads of men and women *en route* to dinner or awaiting belated friends.

Dripping a trail of rain-water and leaving at each step the muddy mark of his wet shoes on the white-tiled floor, he circumnavigated the block-long lobby, scanning faces eagerly, serenely unaware of his soggy and shabby appearance.

A man who saves out only his shabbiest suit of clothes from a denuding gambling tournament cannot be expected to appear presentable.

Jimmy weaved his way in and out of the crowd, until every face was a part of his memory, but she was not there. Once he thought he saw the red sailor-hat, but it proved to be a costly creation of velvet upon the head of a laughing débutante.

The pale, troubled face was not here.

Then where?

Acting on a new impulse, he climbed up the stairs to the mezzanine gallery. He went entirely around, with curious eyes following him. Nicely manicured hands covered smiling mouths—smiles directed at poor Jimmy, who was suffering agonies.

He did not care how she had betrayed him. What if she had hoodwinked him? What if all the talk about a five-thousand-dollar position with a gold-mining company was fraud?

She had had, in spite of that, a reason for soliciting him, for making him a goat! He was permitting himself to become maddened for a sight of her, distressed by a chit of a girl who had, in a swift half-hour, infatuated him.

To give her up now he could not! It was simply unthinkable.

And then, glancing over the mezzanine

balcony-rail, he saw her distinctly, engaged in conversation with an individual on the lobby floor. He could have shouted—and he could have shouted again a second later.

Distant as the twain were from him, he could make out clearly the features of the man talking to her. He could not be mistaken.

Six years had given the memory time enough to grow dim, but that close-packed beard, blacker than jet, those fierce, reddened eyes, belonged to but one man on this entire planet.

Blackthorne! Blackthorne!

What was Blackthorne having to say to that girl? Indeed, what was Blackthorne doing out of Leavenworth?

Nearly upsetting a simpering young man in fawn-colored spats who obstructed his way, Jimmy went down stairs three at a bound, pivoted around a fat marble pillar, and elbowed his way toward them.

They were still there, apparently ignorant of his onrushing presence, conversing as though no one else in the entire world existed. He could make out Blackthorne's youthful gray suit distinctly.

And then a mighty arm pinioned his right wrist, while a gruff voice inquired:

"Well, you dead beat, you; what are you going to do about it?"

Jimmy struggled, but his good friend, the taxi-driver, had him where he wanted him, and he seemed quite unwilling to release him from that embarrassing position.

"I'm going to hammer that beer-soaked face until your own mother won't recognize it! That's what I'm going to do if you don't take that hand away," snarled Jimmy. "You'd better. I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, I'm not," growled the other. "All I want out of you is three dollars and eighty cents. There's a cop waiting outside if you don't kick through—*now!*"

Jimmy struggled feebly. He could see, over his shoulder, that Blackthorne and the girl were drifting away.

He ground his teeth.

"Listen," he said persuasively, "I'll promise to give you one hundred dollars in cold cash to-morrow, if you let me go. That fellow over there is a murderer—a murderer!"

"Ha, ha!" said the taxi man. "Maybe Sweeney might understand that language. I can't. Do you want to tell it to the judge, or are you coming through?

"Cough up—or the joy-wagon! That's my answer."

Jimmy wiggled, but no thought came to answer this riddle. He was at his rope's end. And at that instant a most amazing thing took place.

His right wrist, it will be recalled, was firmly gripped in the steel claws of the taxicab driver. His left wrist, however, was dangling at his side, and the fingers of his left hand were half curled.

Into these half-curled fingers was softly pushed a small wad of crinkly paper, and a sweet voice said.

"Pay him. Good-by! Do not forget!"

He turned in time to see her vanishing through the crowd alone, walking lightly and swiftly toward the entrance by which he had come.

"Come through with that money!"

"Let me go! Darn you! Let me go!"

Jimmy was something of an iron man, to be sure, but any one who had gripped the steering-wheel of a New York taxicab for as many years as had his captor could be depended upon to have qualities of that same metal.

"But she's getting away, I tell you!" snapped Jimmy.

"Let her get," said the other. "Come through with that greenback, or—"

"But you know I haven't a cent!"

"You're a liar! Open your other hand."

Jimmy acted upon the suggestion immediately.

Neatly folded in the palm of his left hand was a crisp, new five-dollar bill!

"Well, I'll be—" he began. "Take it!" he added joyously. "Keep the change!"

He turned, preparing to dash for the door through which she was now slipping—slipping, not out of the door, but out of his very existence.

## IV.

"One moment!"

A heavy hand upon his shoulder arrested him, spinning him about.

Large buck teeth and unpleasant blue

eyes in a lantern-jawed face now confronted him, and, it may be added, angered him.

"Well, what do *you* want?" snapped Jimmy.

"Me? I am the house detective," stated that one in positive tones—tones whose authority could not possibly be denied. "I been watching you—following you around for five minutes—ever since you sneaked in that there door. What's your game, fellow?"

"I've been looking for some one," explained Jimmy hastily, "and she just went out the door—that girl with the red hat."

The house detective sniffed. "Just the same, fellow, I'm going to let you make that explanation in the proper surroundings—where you'll have to swear to it on a Bible."

"You're not going to—" began Jimmy in dismay.

"Exactly what I'm going to do," rejoined his captor grimly. He was urging Jimmy toward the door, and a sizable crowd was collecting.

Jimmy stared at the closing curious circle with the feeling that he was facing the firing squad. He had been caught in many tight pinches, but none so outrageously and ridiculously tight as this one.

Within an hour, since leaving the Panama steamer, he had been transformed from an innocent vagabond into a desperate character.

The windows of life that had been drenched by a golden, romantic sunshine now were cold and clammy with a gray, unfriendly rain.

He was about to be shoved through the great, gold-framed doors when suddenly out of the crowd a face seemed to stand, as though it were carved in relief, the sharp gray face of an old-young man, whose hair was yellow and whose eyes were the color of rubbed steel.

This man was staring at Jimmy with a light of alarm and delight dawning in his countenance, and Jimmy was staring back at him in much the same fashion.

Rudely the stranger broke a cleft through the crowd, and quickly blocked the way to the door by a flank movement, which was, in a way, skilful.

As if the house detective had been a cheap servant the old-young man pushed him aside with a jab of his elbow, and gripped Jimmy by the wet coat-lapels.

"Aren't you Jimmy Webb?" he exclaimed.

"Yes!" cried Jimmy.

"I am Oliver Menasco. Didn't you recognize me? What's the trouble? What's all this excitement—"

"Holy mackerel, Ollie, get me out of this mess. Convince my buck-toothed guardian that I'm on the square. He thinks I'm everything from a pickpocket to a safe-cracker!"

"But what the devil—"

"Ollie, are you with me, or aren't you?" demanded Jimmy grimly.

"Certainly!"

He addressed the house detective.

"What do you mean by assaulting this young man? Don't you know who he is?"

"I don't care who he is, and I don't care who you are!" fumed the house detective. "Take your hand away, or I'll biff you!"

"And the first biff will land you behind one-inch bars in Leavenworth," said Menasco through gritted teeth. "You roughneck! I've half a notion to have you fired."

"You first show me—" stuttered the hotel detective, his face suddenly very red.

"Certainly!" snapped Menasco, flipping back his coat lapel.

The lantern jaw drooped. Worry and fear were expressed in that gaping face.

"But he—"

"Shut up!" said Menasco.

"Yes, sir," said the hotel detective meekly.

The secret-service man looked for Jimmy Webb, but that young man was no longer present. He was streaking down the wet sidewalk, vanishing like a spectral dervish into the drifting cold mist.

Oliver Menasco went outside, dropped his hands to his hips, and swore. He had not seen Jimmy Webb since leaving college. He was anxious to have a talk over old times, but he was more than anxious, he was positively eager to find out what that young devil had been up to in the ultradignified

lobby of that ultrarespectable Van Stetlin.

At length a dejected figure slouched toward him. The shoulders were drooping, and the long arms were limp at the sides.

It was Jimmy, returning.

"I couldn't find her, Ollie," he said

"Find who?" said Menasco

"The girl in the red hat. She went out that door, and she went up the street. Now I suppose I'll never see her again. Darnation!"

"A girl?" questioned Menasco suspiciously. He was looking into the other's face for signs of mischief; he knew James Webb very well. In fact he had always had very definite suspicions as to the sophomore who hung the lady skeleton upon the psychology professor's front gate—one of Dartmouth's undying mysteries.

But he could divine nothing but grim sincerity in Jimmy's sun-tanned countenance, that and grievous disappointment.

"Well," he suggested as they began crossing Broadway, "shall we throw out the net?"

"What net?"

"The dragnet—police—round her in, I mean. Is she the sort of woman who would carry a revolver—stiletto?"

"Holy mackerel, no!" snorted Jimmy. "She's a mystery, that's all. I met her on the Panama Line pier late this afternoon when my steamer docked—"

"You've just come back from Cerro de Pasco, haven't you, James?"

"That's it."

"Let's go in here and talk things over. You lucky stiff." Menasco was opening the door of a dark, musty little café. "Unless my guess is wrong you've stumbled upon one of the steepest mysteries that ever set the department on its ear. We'll have a drink, and—"

They found a table in a little stall, where talk could be carried on without danger of eavesdropping.

"Now," said Menasco, lighting the black cigarette Jimmy had proffered him, "tell me what happened. Remember—every detail counts in my business."

"What business are you in?" inquired Jimmy innocently.

"Secret service."

"So?" breathed Jimmy, with interest. "You always were a *Sherlock Holmes* at ferreting out the fraternity house problems, such as who stole my pearl cuff-links, and —who hung the lady skeleton on the front gate—"

"You know I never got to the bottom of that," stated Menasco sternly.

He flicked an ash away

"Never mind the lady skeleton. You tell me your story."

Jimmy frowned at the table cover and lucidly recited the chief events of the afternoon.

Oliver Menasco watched him solemnly, showing slight concern at mention of the Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation.

Jimmy reached the point at which, in his own words, "Just as I was rounding the west end of the mezzanine balcony, I saw her talking to a black-bearded man, whose eyes were bloodshot. I know he was Blackthorne. Damn him, I—"

Menasco was half across the table

"Blackthorne? Are you positive?" he demanded excitedly.

Jimmy looked at him skeptically.

"Do you think I am spinning a fairy tale to amuse you?"

Menasco's face was terrible to look upon. It was white and gray, and the muscles fairly stood out in it.

"And that brainless hotel detective—let Blackthorne slip away!"

He groaned.

"Did you know—no, you couldn't. Blackthorne escaped from Leavenworth last week—through a ventilating shaft. I've been after him for thirty-six hours without a wink of sleep."

He groaned again

"And—and he's slipped me!"

"But, Ollie," put in Jimmy sympathetically. "That's not a matter for the Federal authorities—he's a State criminal, isn't he?

"No. No, you're right. Stock-jobbing does come under the Federal law, doesn't it?"

"He was sent up for stock-jobbing," said Menasco grimly. "But that—that's nothing."

He snapped his fingers to emphasize the littleness of that offense.

"He's got something new afoot. It's baffling. Somehow, we've just found out, he has been in communication with the outside for more than a year.

"What his new game may be, we can't tell. We know it's not counterfeiting. He has the master criminal brain, which means—something more masterly next time.

"Stock-jobbing was pin money to him a small side issue. That man's everything—one of the most expert forgers in the country, a past master at safe cracking, a tenth-degree engraver–

"Well," he sighed, "go ahead and name any branch of crime you can think of, and I can tell you exactly why Blackthorne is the king of it."

"Colossal!" murmured Jimmy. "Ollie, I never told you, and I don't think I ever shall, but Blackthorne—well, I've sworn to kill Blackthorne the first time we meet."

Menasco was breathing heavily, but he looked up with instant interest.

"That's all I can tell you—rather, all I care to tell you," went on Jimmy. "So if I can be of any help—"

"You can," said the government man. "Tell me the name and address of the girl in the red hat. If I'd only come to the Van Stettlin three minutes sooner—but they skipped.

"Well, anyway, give me her name and address. I'll squeeze *her!*"

"Didn't I mention," replied Jimmy contritely, "that she refused to give me her name?"

Menasco eyed him doubtfully.

"You're not trying to shield her, are you?"

"Certainly not! She doesn't need shielding. She's straight. I'm no detective, but I'm old enough, and I've known enough of them, to be able to tell when a woman is honest.

"She *is* honest, Ollie, whoever she is. Why—why I could tell that simply by looking into those wonderful black eyes of hers!"

"You're in love with an adventuress," said Menasco with a snort

Jimmy relapsed instantly into silence. He never had been one to argue.

Menasco tactfully gave in.

"She must be," he agreed earnestly. "Certainly Blackthorne's too big to bother with a worn-out Nevada gold-mine—if your girl's story about the Argonaut Corporation is the truth. Yet, where could any gold-mine in Nevada be located? Aren't they all worn out?"

Jimmy scratched his head.

"Almost all," he replied. "A few fair properties—isolated—are left. I'm going to look them up to-morrow anyway. If there is a five-thousand-dollar job going begging ."

But Menasco was no longer interested. His eyes were half shut. His forehead was a mass of wrinkles, and there was a dark notch between his eyes.

"I must report to headquarters," he said finally, arising.

"One moment," said Jimmy, following his example. "Loan me some money until we meet again. I have no carfare."

"Five enough?"

"And a nickel for this pay telephone."

"Certainly!" agreed Menasco willingly. That was a favorite word, "certainly!" He was a very businesslike young detective.

Reaching into his pocket he extracted several bills, and handed one to Jimmy together with a five-cent piece. Half way to the door he paused, and called back:

"I'm leaving for Washington on the seven o'clock. I'll have to run for it. If you've nothing else on hand meet me in the Van Stettlin lobby to-morrow at six—for dinner "

"Fair enough," said Jimmy, entering the telephone booth.

He dropped the nickel in the slot and called the familiar number in the Heights.

"Hello?" said the sweet voice.

"Why, you're crying!" accused Jimmy. "What's wrong, mother?"

"Oh, is that you, James? What became of you? I was afraid "

"Only your nerves, mother," he said comfortingly. "I was delayed. My bartender friend had a hard time scraping together enough for my loan.

"I'll start for the apartment right away. And, mother—"

"Yes, James?"

"I've landed a job!"

His voice sank a tone.

"Maybe I have," he added.

"Oh, have you?"

Yet her voice, even in the face of this splendid news, was not especially interested.

"Yep! Five thousand a year! It's with the Argonaut Gold Mining—"

"With whom?" came a gasp.

"The Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada!" he shouted triumphantly.

He plainly heard her breathing—sharp, hysterical!

"James, you must not take that position until I see you! Something terrible has happened. No, I cannot mention it over the phone.

"You must hurry. I cannot wait an instant later than eight forty-five."

"I'll leave at once—in a taxicab," he said. "Don't worry, I'm coming!"

Yet he was nervous as he hung up the receiver. Why should she have shown agitation at his mention of the Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada? Probably a fly-by-night, a wildcat, at the best.

And what terrible thing could have happened to her?

Jimmy forced a smile. He knew that his mother was prone to exaggeration; that mice in the pantry became nothing less than wild elephants in her versions!

## V.

JIMMY happened to glance at the clock on the wall of the café on his way out.

Seven six.

He had less than forty minutes in which to reach One Hundred and Fortieth Street. He stood still a moment, oblivious to the teeming rain. Then he started off toward the lights of Broadway, half running.

There were but two means of reaching One Hundred and Fortieth Street in forty minutes: the one, One Hundred and Thirty-Seventh Street subway station, via subway, then walk, or a taxicab all the way.

He hailed a passing taxicab, which exhibited the red flag.

The cab described a violent arc, skidding to the curb where Jimmy waited. He jerked open the door and started to climb inside.

Beagle eyes examined him distrustfully.

"Wait a minute, there!"

"What's matter?" inquired Jimmy, stepping back to the sidewalk.

"Lemme see the color of your money," said the driver. "I ain't in this business for charity reasons."

"The very idea!" said Jimmy in wounded tones.

He flipped the five-dollar bill from his pocket and flaunted it under the hawklike nose.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Hundred and Fortieth."

"Can't oblige you to-night, bo; streets too slippery. Haven't any skid-chains. Off duty fifteen minutes ago, anyhow."

Jimmy dropped his left fist into his coat-pocket and jumped in beside the driver.

The man was apparently paralyzed by this unexpected maneuver.

"What in—" he began.

Jimmy jabbed his thumb into the fellow's ribs.

"Trek!" he said in an icy-cold voice. "This pistol is loaded, and—I'm a desperate man!"

The ribs pressing against his thumb shivered

"All right, bo! Don't shoot! I'm moving. Where to?"

"Broadway and One Hundred and Fortieth. Bust open the speed laws, and if you slow down for cops I'll certainly puncture you properly!"

"Yes, sir. Right!"

The gears groaned. And the cab leaped into sparkling Broadway.

Jimmy quickly lost the humor of the situation. He knew that he had committed an act which might earn for him, if he were apprehended, a number of years in very unpleasant surroundings. He withdrew his thumb.

"Say," he began in a thoughtful voice as they bounded across the Forty-Second Street car tracks, "I don't think I'd shoot you, anyway. Wait! Keep right on going.

"I mean, I'm not a crook, or a bum, or

a stick-up man. I'm simply in a hurry to get home to my mother. She hasn't seen me for two years."

His appeal did not succeed, however, in arousing his companion's sympathy.

"The heck with that!" said the driver, neatly avoiding a down-bound automobile which swerved out of a side street -"only don't shoot!"

"When you get me home I'm going to make you a present of a nice ten-dollar bill."

"That sounds reasonable," was the grumbled response—"only—don't cock that gun by any mistake."

The quadrangle of Seventy-Second and Broadway loomed ahead.

There was a glitter of buttons. A figure leaped in front of them!

The cab came to a grinding stop.

"What's the big idea?" inquired the policeman in a disgusted voice. "I've had reports on this runaway taxicab all the way up from Thirty-Fifth.

"You guys must think this is the Speedway. What you been doing—robbing a bank -or something?"

"Ask him," said the driver irritably. "He's got—"

"Step on that accelerator if you value your life, pardner!" said Jimmy in a rasping whisper in his companion's ear.

The policeman leaped aside. The taxicab leaped ahead.

Realizing that a general alarm would be spread for this inspired automobile, Jimmy disembarked at Manhattan Street for safety's sake, pressed the bill into his companion's fingers, and started off at a run.

The taxicab vanished down a side street, where it probably went in retirement for the remainder of the night.

Jimmy had fifteen blocks to cover, and goodness knows what time it had grown to be!

At a drug-store he paused and looked in the window. He had less than three minutes in which to run more than five blocks!

She had said eight-forty-five—not an instant later! What terrible thing could have happened to arouse her to such an excited pitch?

Jimmy was quite out of breath when he reached the modest "walk-up" apartment building where his mother had resided for the past five years. There was no one at the telephone switchboard, so he hastened up the stairs to the third landing, panting laboriously.

Before a dark, deeply set oak door, marked E-3, he stopped and pushed the button.

He heard the bell ring distantly a faint, tinkling clamor.

There was no answer.

He rang again, nervously

Silence!

The door was locked, and a fear of what might await him behind that stark panel set Jimmy's nerves to jingling. He knew of only one way—the fire-escape

The window at the end of the corridor opened upon it, and Jimmy hastened to open this.

Below him were roofs and, distantly, twinkling lights. The tinny sound of a banjo came up in a rag-time tune from an unseen courtyard.

He moved cautiously, sliding his fingers along the glazed brick. He encountered a window, and his hands slipped through a crack at the bottom.

The window went up with a squeal of rusted pulleys. An odor of food, of bread and butter and lard—all of the mixed smells of a kitchen used only for breakfasts—assailed him.

Fumbling fingers encountered the wall-switch.

A ceiling lamp burned, and the cheap alarm clock on the stove indicated eight-fifty-one.

He was six minutes late!

Jimmy pushed open the swinging door and entered the tiny dining-room, then went down the hall, switching on the lights in both bedrooms, where he was surprised at finding, not only in his mother's room but in the cell-like chamber which he occupied when in New York, evidences of hasty departure.

The drawers of his dresser were open and their contents disturbed, and the door of the closet stood ajar.

According to Jimmy's recollections, which, in this particular matter, were two

years old, he had left behind him, when he started for South America, several—three or four—suits of fall and winter clothes

One of these he remembered—as he had prized it highly—was a suit of light gray tweed, made by a high-priced down-town tailor.

He was displeased to observe that this suit was now missing, but he was positively mystified to discover that the vest of the suit was still upon the hanger.

Next he went to the small living-room, a tastefully arranged place, somehow reminiscent of his golden-haired, blue-eyed mother.

It, too, was light and pretty, with a suggestion of her blue eyes in the portières into the entrance hall.

At the small mahogany secretary he paused, and believed that here he had found a solution not only to her hasty departure but to that note of terror which sounded in her voice.

A square white envelope, with *James* written across it in her familiar handwriting reposed upon the green blotter. As he tore open the flap a number of bills fluttered out.

Jimmy recovered them. Each was a fifty-dollar bill. There were eight altogether.

He read the note eagerly, stuffing the bills carelessly into a trouser-pocket.

Boy

Let them hire you at your own figure And be sure, when you have time, to write to your Aunt Ollie Come and see me whenever you can—please do. Keep this money, and do not, please, take such foolish chances. Take very good care of your health. How long you have been away! One month over two years! Rest comfortably. No need of your waiting up for my return. Have gone on a rather indefinite visit. Everything is all right, after all. Remember me to her if you write Aunt Ollie to-night. Eat, if you are hungry—plenty of things in the ice-box.

Lovingly,
MOTHER

Jimmy read the note through twice. What on earth was the meaning of such nonsense? He decided that she must have been hysterical.

Aunt Ollie! Who under the sun was Aunt Ollie? And why, he further inquired, had she made that ambiguous reference to a "rather indefinite visit?"

And if she had gone out for the evening, why could she not have waited until the morning to give him that peculiar advice about his new job?

Strangely enough, she made no reference to her earlier remark concerning the Argonaut Mining Corporation of Nevada as undesirable unemployers. He paced the floor, wondering.

Mystery was most surely afoot. Aunt Ollie? And suddenly he stopped his pacing.

By any possibility had she written that note under command? Was the reference to Aunt Ollie simply a broad hint that Oliver Menasco, the secret-service man, had been endeavoring to reach him? Perhaps Ollie had tried to get in touch with him at the apartment from a telephone booth in the Pennsylvania station.

"Impossible!" he murmured. "Utterly absolutely impossible!"

The thing was absurd. He was unnerved; his nerves, his faculties were tattered—untrustworthy, after the evening's violent experiences.

He was not himself. He should go to bed and try to sleep it off.

He was a stubborn young man this Jimmy Webb. Yet he had never considered himself in any light as the possessor of the stuff from which is made detectives.

"No!" stated Jimmy positively, who, like most normal beings, talked aloud when alone and greatly agitated. "No, I refuse to believe it."

He went out into the kitchen and found that an hour and a half had passed. It was now close to ten-thirty.

Ollie should arrive in Washington between midnight and one. He could reach him by long distance at the New Willard no earlier than one-thirty

Carrying the clock into his bedroom he set the alarm to ring at one-fifteen. He decided to give his overworked brain an opportunity to catch up by snatching a few hours sleep.

Five minutes later he sprang up nervously and walked to the closet, where he disposed his right hand upon the door-jamb and stared speculatively at the gray vest.

It was very light gray, and the black-bearded man in the lobby of the Van Stettlin had worn a very light gray suit.

"Fiddlesticks!" he snorted.

But sleep was no longer in question. He strode into the bath-room, flicked on the light over the washstand, and glared into the mirror.

Baffled brown eyes, which on most other occasions would have been bright and happy brown eyes, glared uncompromisingly back at him.

Jimmy stroked his square jaw thoughtfully. It hissed when he ran his hand over it, indicating a pressing need of thin steel.

He pulled open the mirror, which was an efficient device, hiding a small array of toilet articles in a tiny cupboard, and he arranged upon the edge of the porcelain washbowl a safety razor, a tube of shaving soap, and a tufted brush.

Absent-mindedly he fingered the bristles of the brush, and at once the feeling of alarm crept back into him.

The bristles were damp from quite recent usage!

Now Jimmy knew that the last time he had used that shaving brush had been two years ago, before departing for the South. He had forgotten to pack his shaving kit in the haste of leaving, and had picked up another, he remembered, in Balboa, while awaiting the Peru steamer, a kit which was now in the possession of that vivacious gambler—Poker or "Five Aces" Sanderson.

Certainly the shaving brush could not have remained damp for two years, no matter how humid the New York atmosphere occasionally became. Ridiculous! And certainly his mother had no use for a safety razor

Might she have a surprise for him—a stepfather? That, too, was absurd. She would have confessed such a thrilling secret during their first telephone conversation.

Moreover, he would have found evidences of a man's occupation of the apartment. There were none.

So he turned on the hot-water faucet pensively, and then snapped it off with such haste that the water made a thudding sound in the pipes.

Black hairs—a perfect nest of them—in the stopper hole!

## VI.

JIMMY shuddered, then turned on the hot-water faucet full blast!

Steam arose hotly, swarming up around his cheeks, coating the mirror with a mist. He did not mind that; he was filled with loathing for those black hairs; he wanted to flush them into the drain pipe—into the sewer—out of his sight!

And he tried earnestly and with that fierce stubbornness of his to stop drawing horrible conclusions. All of this would be explained in the morning.

Urged by the necessity of calmness, which was called for by the business of shaving, he began hoeing white lather from his brown complexion.

Rinsing his skin, he rolled up his sleeves and laved hands and face and neck with delicately perfumed soap—fragrantly reminiscent of his mother.

It was an oval lavender cake that soap, and Jimmy sniffed it pleasurably. While soap had always been a good friend of his, his most recent travels had brought it to him in the form of orange-colored sticks, commonly used in a brew known among sailing men as "sujee," used in collaboration with stiff brooms for the purpose of imparting to the decks of ships a clean, white appearance.

Accordingly, Jimmy reveled momentarily in the fragrant oval cake of lavender, so delicately remindful of his mother's lovely cleanliness.

Massaging his face, hands, and arms with a splendidly rough bath towel, he returned to his bedroom in search of something more presentable than a flannel shirt. His reason was a curious one.

The most obvious thing for him to have done would have been to slip out of his clothes and into a pair of pajamas. Yet he felt that his self-respect had been wounded too many times this evening, from which emotions it can be drawn that Jimmy Webb was a highly sensitive young man.

He had been mistaken for a porter—or, had he, honestly? Anyway, he had been taken for a tramp on three occasions.

Certainly he had no intention of venturing out again to-night, but his intentions most positively were to attire himself, for his own satisfaction, as a gentleman, in linen shirt, linen collar, and suit which, even though it happened to be two years of age, was still within the bounds of fashion

He simply wanted to convince himself - no one but himself—that he really could look like a gentleman, although, he reasoned, fradulently, that it would be an excellent idea to find out if his two-year-old garments fitted. He had grown, broadened, in the two years past.

Jimmy was not at all dissatisfied with the image which took form in the looking-glass over his dresser. The dark blue coat was slightly tight about the shoulders, but the vest fitted nicely, and the white collar gave him a touch of respectability that might have been startling had it not been such a pleasant improvement.

Although, fortunately, Jimmy was not aware of the fact, the transformation made him quite handsome, although his face was too strong, too stubborn for that precise classification.

He really looked like a man who had been through tropical adventures, who had tasted of love, under romantic equatorial moons, and of mystery, and, perhaps, of bitterness a little.

At all events, that would have been the impression given to a bystander who had never looked into that seasoned but enthusiastic young face before.

Fashionably, almost abreast of the times, and a little bizarre, because he was a little behind them, Jimmy stepped out into the living room. And at that instant the telephone-bell, hidden from sight by a pile of magazines on the shelf of the secretary, rang sharply!

He was trembling, shocked! It was as though a voice had shrieked at his from utter darkness!

Dropping his elbow upon the note he lifted the receiver

The drone of long-distance wires hummed in his ear.

There were clicks, fantom voices!

Then the line cleared.

"Hello—Jimmy?"

"Ollie? You in Washington already?"

"No. I met the chief at the Philadelphia station. Listen! I can say very little over the telephone Understand?"

There was a grating rattle, as though the god of electricity himself had taken exception to this libel.

"Yes," Jimmy was saying. "You called me up earlier, didn't you? Where are you?"

"Yep, I did. Your mother answered. Very much worried, I took it. Where is she now?"

"God knows!"

"Don't you know where she went? Did she leave no message?"

Menasco's voice was tense with anxiety

"Yes; it's a crazy thing. I'll read it." He did.

Silence followed

"That is queer," commented the man in Philadelphia. "Aunt Ollie is me, of course! She must have written that at the point of a gun!"

"So I thought. It means nothing—"

"And that darned gold mine company again!" added Menasco irritably.

"Jimmy, I hate to break bad news. But —"

"What is it?" demanded Jimmy hoarsely. "My mother? Something happened to her?"

"We've just been in communication with one of our men in New York. Perhaps he tapped a wire. I don't know. Your mother is missing!"

"What do you mean?"

"She is no longer in New York. Our man is sure. He was watching your apartment.

"Why? I can't tell you over the phone. She went in a black Bliss touring-car. The police reported—too late to stop her -that she had crossed to Fort Lee on the Forty-Second Street ferry

"Our suspicions are that she is to be joined by another -"

"—you mean?"

"Mention no names through this telephone!" ordered a sharp voice, hardly recognizable as Menasco's. "Answer me carefully. Have you any well-grounded suspicions that—"

"I I cannot believe that!" cried Jimmy, anguished.

"Take my advice," said Menasco kindly, "get some sleep. If anything happens I'll ring you.

"Otherwise—to-morrow night—the Van Stettlin."

A distant click, the humming of an idle wire: Menasco was disconnected.

He, Jimmy Webb, go to sleep to-night? What brutal irony! He became conscious of the clock ticking, an irritating sound which penetrated the turmoil of his brain.

The uncertainty, his helplessness, the tormenting evidence he had uncovered distilled a poison in his veins, maddening him. His mother — that young, independable mother of his—vanished!

"With whom? Why? What could she have done to attract the absorbed attention of the secret-service men?

They spoke of her as though she had committed some criminal act. The phrase, "The police reported—crossed to Fort Lee," ran through his brain.

Perhaps he should have mentioned to Menasco his discóvery of the moist shaving brush, the loss of his gray tweed.

Yet he was sure, even in the present feverish state of his mind, that these evi dences were probably misleading. Again he found himself muttering, "Impossible—utterly impossible!" He was glad he had not mentioned his findings to Ollie.

Very anxiously he read the astounding note over again, carefully searching each word for a hidden meaning.

Jimmy stared at it until his eyes swam, turned it over, dismissed as absurd the theory of invisible ink, then, on a sudden impulse, sought the icebox.

It was a thin, narrow-shouldered icebox, the type commonly found in compact apartment kitchens

Next to the ice in the ice-chest stood a lone bottle of cream, half-emptied. In the other compartments were butter, fresh eggs, sliced ham, celery, lettuce, and yellow salad dressing.

Slamming the doors indignantly, he returned to the living-room, reseated himself at the secretary, and tackled the problem again, wrinkling his forehead severely.

Finally he dropped the note, groaning. It was comprehensible.

Suddenly he sat up. His muscles were stiffened, yet he was shaking as though with a fever-chill.

He had been stupid. No literal message of fear, or warning, or peril was contained in that note. It was written queerly—that should have been enough to advise any sensible man that trouble lurked near the writer.

Blackthorne! Who else?

No earthly being could have inspired such terror into her as to cause such a crazy composition as this.

Blackthorne *had* been in this room!

Blackthorne had been a visitor to this room—his mother's living-room! In all probability Blackthorne had stood over her, perhaps threatening death, while she had written that note!

He snatched the telephone. A drowsy night-operator at length condescended to recognize the frantic jiggling of his telephone hook.

"Trace that Philadelphia call at once," he requested. "It is most important."

He replaced the receiver and waited.

He waited several minutes, and they seemed like several hours.

Then the telephone rang, and the sleepy voice, now possessing a note of impatience, advised him languidly that the Philadelphia party had telephoned from a public booth, and was gone, without trace.

"Good Lord!" groaned Jimmy, hanging up the receiver.

He dropped elbows to knees and stared forlornly at the Oriental rug. The figures—gold, blue, and red—seemed to melt, to float and writhe.

And then he sat up with the jerk.

The telephone-bell was ringing again, a shrill, insistent call!

Brightening, he put the receiver to his ear. They had traced Ollie, after all! He felt quite jubilant about it.

"Hello—Ollie!" he shouted.

"One moment, please!" said the exceedingly formal voice of an operator.

Jimmy waited, and heard a distant musical noise, the dropping of a coin, perhaps. Then:

"Is Mr. Webb there?"

"Mr. Webb talking. Yes, yes! Put him right on!"

"I beg your pardon?"

It was a woman's voice, a young woman, apparently, the Philadelphia long distance operator, so Jimmy imagined

"I said this is James Webb talking! I—connect him, please! Isn't this Philadelphia?"

"No, this is not Philadelphia. Are you listening, Mr. Webb?"

"Certainly I'm listening!" retorted Jimmy impatiently. "Who is this?"

There was a pause. Then:

"In reference to the Argonaut Gold Mining Company of Nevada—"

"Are you—are you the girl in the red hat?" shouted Jimmy excitedly.

Another pause, a very breathless one.

"One of my hats is red," confessed the voice

"The one you were wearing this afternoon? Panama Line pier—taxicab—Hotel Van Stettlin—"

"Perhaps," she admitted instantly. "In reference to the position I mentioned—"

"Where are you?"

"I am in New Jersey."

"Where?"

"I—I cannot tell you."

"You must! Please—" he begged. "I must see you! A terrible thing has happened—"

"I know of that. I—I cannot tell you how sorry I am. But she is safe.

"You hear me? I tell you she is safe. I am trying to befriend you. You must not tell the police. *Do not tell the police.*"

"But where is she?"

"Safe—with me."

"Let me talk with her."

"No. She cannot talk. She sends her love and a message that you must follow my instructions."

"Why can't she talk?"

"She is hysterical! Listen to me, James Webb! I must leave this booth quickly or I will be suspected. Do not tell the police. Do not try to follow.

"To-morrow morning, early, go to the Argonaut Corporation's office—without fail. Be careful. Ask no more questions.

"*But land that job!* And do not apply for it under your own name. That is chiefly why I called you. Use any name that occurs to you—a good name. Wait! I have one for you—Henry Morgan."

"Who is Henry Morgan?"

"Henry Morgan is dead! He was a gold mining engineer in Alaska. He died suddenly on the Yukon last winter. For business reasons the news of his death was suppressed.

"No one knows he is dead except his immediate family, you understand? Morgan was, in spite of his youth, an expert assayist. Such a man is needed for the position with the Argonaut Corporation.

"Last fall, some time, as I recall, some technical reports of his were published in the 'Proceedings of the American Society of Metallurgical Engineers.'

"They were, I think, a critical review of his experiments with the cyanid process, and caused a great deal of favorable comment in the profession. Secure those proceedings, and present them to Mr. Radcliff.

"He should hire you on the strength of them. Look up the last issue of the *Metallurgical Engineer*, and you will find a small advertisement in the classified section, inviting applications for a position as assayer with Argonaut. For safety's sake carry that copy with you."

"But he will ask for references," protested Jimmy, after he had absorbed all of this.

"I will leave that point to your ingenuity," she replied coolly. "I had thought that you were daring—well, dare you run these risks and those other risks—"

"I'll go!" snapped Jimmy. "But tell me where are—"

The dull buzzing of an empty line!

She was gone!

## VII

JIMMY WEBB pushed the telephone away from him with a long and exceedingly nervous sigh.

At first an apparently innocuous acquaintance, the girl in the red sailor hat had proved, by midnight, to be an ominous factor, or, at least, an important one.

In some fashion, he realized, the affairs

of the Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada were bound up in the other mysteries of to-night—the missing gray tweed—the vanishing touring-car!

He opened the window and looked out and down upon the white, hard lights of Broadway. The rain had stopped falling, and the night had become clear and cold and very quiet.

The broad thoroughfare went up and over the slope, picked out by keen light-points, seeming to wind, from that elevation like an electric serpent. Distantly occurred the chesty triple-voiced siren of an ocean liner creeping into port from another world.

Over his head delicate stars were pricking their way through a chilly envelope of cloud. A faint odor, as of a distant field, fresh plowed, stirred him with vague longings.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy Webb did not love New York. He liked sincerity, and he detested artificiality. It was his opinion an opinion based upon genuine experience—that the stone and iron face of any city — and this one particularly — covered up, hid, and buried, all that was worth while in humanity.

His world, to be sure, was not the city His heart was not with the men of the city.

It was a pleasure vastly greater for him to grip the beefy paw of a bushwhacker, a sourdough, or a fence-rider, than to accept the lily-white fingers of a dozen city-bred millionaires.

No; Jimmy was not a Socialist. He knew millionaires—of a kind, and he admired them exceedingly, after his own individual fashion.

These were not men who had builded their fortunes upon unearned increment, or upon the withering souls and shrunken bodies of a city's underfed.

They were masters of their kind—men who had packed in to the wilds, who had hacked and blasted their wealth from the stubborn earth, accumulating riches by the sweat of their own muscle-bound hands. For the most part they were successful miners, of course—because he was a miner.

But he had met others in the Far West—ranchmen, too, who were of the same type. He admired most the men who came out into the open and fought for it, perhaps because he was a fighter in the open himself. And he disliked the city because it expressed the opposite of freedom.

"God's country!" to Jimmy Webb, was not bounded ever by any city limits. It was to be found where the stars were brighter than an ocean of diamonds, where things grew under a blazing sun, and where women were worth the fighting. His country might be the rolling prairie, the dark and everlasting forests, the brooding, magnetic hills.

Having been blessed with a fertile imagination he could see all of this at will as he leaned with solemn eyes out of the opened window and frowned upon the city asleep underneath him.

And at that moment Jimmy saw something which had nothing to do with his imagination. The glimpse came to him at first as something detached, as a thought will sometimes disconnect itself from others and stand out sharply.

The lonely figure in the street he had taken at first to be a policeman, plodding this beat with a little more than the usual conscientiousness.

The figure, as Jimmy could discern by a street light, now that his interest was aroused, was not clothed in the blue-and-brass of a police officer.

Perhaps he was a plain-clothes man, assigned to do his share in ferreting out one of New York's every-day mysteries.

However, the sight was something of a novelty, so he watched the plain-clothes man curiously. He was walking up the sidewalk from the corner.

Now he was passing directly under Jimmy's nose. He halted!

Jimmy's interest quickened a bit.

The man had on a black and perfectly round felt hat. What Jimmy could see of his structure from that elevated view-point inclined him to believe that the man was stout

He was in the shadows and he was looking up. There was no question about that. His face was as round as the top of his hat, and it was inclined backward, resting, so it seemed, almost between his shoulder-blades.

At what floor was this night-hawk gazing? By any chance could he be interested in the person or actions of James Webb?

Discreetly Jimmy withdrew from the window, snapped off the light and returned.

The man was still looking up. Perhaps he saw Jimmy's face, although only Jimmy's forehead jutted over the window-sill and he was in the shadow

At all events, the watcher suddenly moved to the other side of the street, where, with hands on hips, he continued to stare.

Then, as if satisfied, perhaps, that all was well, he walked rapidly toward Broadway and disappeared in the rear entrance of an all-night saloon

Jimmy was too tired to sleep now; the visitor in the street had given his nervous system a second wind, so to speak. So he kneeled there, with his eyes upon the saloon's back entrance, until his legs grew numb and his elbows ached, and finally dawn came up over the roof-tops and chased the shadows away.

Yet he continued to guide his speculations in the same groove. Could such mystifying events as those in which he had been a silent partner during the past twelve hours - since landing from the Panama liner, possibly take place in the land of the midnight hills and the sky-blue prairies?

In such virile surroundings would he be watched by some one's underling, as he had been watched during the earlier hours of the night? He thought not

He fell to wondering if Nevada, that State of the latest national gold rush which long ago had waned, would live up to the pictures his mind painted of it. Would there be hale fellows, hardened by the sun and bitten by the sand, to clap hands to his back when he dropped his cow-hided foot to the brass rail and shouted that famous and delightful cry: "Drinks for the bunch! Step up, gentlemen!"

Jimmy smiled commiseratingly upon insipid Broadway bathed by the dawn.

And there would be a sheriff, a great, bluff fellow, with a splendid tin star pinned upon his capacious blue-flannel-shirted bosom.

Yes, siree! The prospect of shouldering mystery and perils in the employ of the Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada appealed squarely to the romance and adventure which coursed with the sturdy red in Jimmy's veins.

Yet it must not be supposed that while these reckless thoughts were pounding through his brain Jimmy's native cunning was undergoing a blood letting.

First—he had to land that job! And he had not weighed gold alongside of sourdoughs in the Yukon or coughed in the laboratory at Cerro de Pasco at twenty-five hundred per annum without picking up trustworthy pointers on the subject of "How a Prospective Employer Must Be Approached."

"Neatly, but with a vigor," epitomized Jimmy as he staggered across the living-room rug on his numb legs and into his bedroom. "Broadway," he muttered as he began stripping off his clothes. "Broadway? Humph!" he added with a sarcastic sniff

He sauntered nakedly into the porcelain bath room, stepped into the bathtub, and as he turned on the icy shower he chanted, between shivers, his favorite quotation from Service, the adventurer's poet.

This chant under an icy shower was a ritual. He had made the discovery that it took his mind from the cold water to a certain degree.

"I wanted the gold, and I sought it,
I scrambled and mucked like a slave
Was it famine or scurvy—I fought it,
I hurled my youth into a grave!"

He emitted an ecstatic and painful squeal. The water splattering on his shoulders was glacial.

"I hurled my youth into a grave!
I wanted the gold, and I got it—
Came out with a fortune last fall—
Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
And somehow the gold isn't all!

"Ching-g-g-a-a-o-o!" he chattered

Rubbing himself briskly with a bath-towel he ventured another peek from the window.

The sun was coming up. The saloon door was closed. Probably the watcher would return at a later hour—at a seasonable hour of arising—or send another man.

He assumed that, for if they considered him worth watching, the vigil would, of course, be continued by daylight; and it was his intention to disappoint this mysterious sleuth by slipping out of the apartment before respectable people were stirring.

He dressed hastily, then went out into the kitchen with the air of a man who knew how, fried himself a mess of ham and eggs, cooked some coffee (the longer it cooked the better he liked it), fetched out bread and butter, and sat himself down to enjoy what he frankly considered to be a meal sufficiently tasty to make a French cook outrageously envious.

After breakfast he slipped into his coat, brushed his hair—he always wetted it with water until it attained a fine polish when in civilization—fingered lovingly the bank-roll thoughtfully left behind by his mother, and ventured into Broadway, which was already filling with the carts and motor-cars of workaday.

Standing on the curbstone he looked up and down the sidewalk, paying especial heed to the back door of the saloon, and, satisfying himself that none of the men near by bore themselves suspiciously, he stopped in a twenty-four-hour cigar-store, where he broke the first fifty-dollar-bill for the most expensive cigar in the place.

Respectable New York was arriving sleepily at offices and shops when Jimmy reached a grimy gray building on Thirty-Ninth Street, not far from Seventh Avenue. He reappeared in ten minutes with two pamphlets under his arm.

Walking slowly he opened the first of these pamphlets, which was a mining trade journal, and ran his eye down a double-column of classified adds, one of which he digested frowningly. No wonder he was puzzled.

**WHO DARES?**

WANTED—An assayer, gold. Must be experienced, with strong references. Man desired who can keep mouth shut when approached by prying competitors. No job for a weakling. Good fighters can apply. Salary five thousand dollars with year's contract. More if can make good. This is no job for adventure hunters. Hard work. Hard fighting. Good food and lodging. Apply after eleven o'clock on or after April 12.—Radcliff, Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation of Nevada, fifteenth floor, Blakeworth Building, New York

**(To Be Continued NEXT WEEK.)**


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# AUSTIN IRBY—OPERATOR.—No. 5.

## "Cow Heels."

BY WILL MACMAHON.

AILROAD Telegrapher Austin Irby, fifteen and one-half years old, and accordingly known by his fellow craftsmen of the Pittsburgh-West Division as "Our Child Operator," suddenly discovered that his beloved job was undesirable, distasteful, impossible.

Not that the boy had tired of what he called "operating"; ah, no! He loved the business with a fatalistic fervor.

"Once an operator," Austin was fond of asserting, "always an operator!" And then he would add a silent, secret declaration of: "Gee, I'm glad of it!"

Born to be a telegrapher, the first and second fingers and the thumb of his right hand fairly itched to grasp the disk of the sending key; his eyes gloated over the oscillating relay arm, and his ears eagerly drank in the dots and dashes from the sounder.

Nor did very young Mr. Irby wish to sever his lengthy relations of a year with the road and venture into other fields of telegraphic endeavor.

Never! He had worked six months as day message operator, janitor, porter, packing-box stenciler, bill-clerk, and slavy for a lazy agent in "FO" freight office, and now had completed a half year as night man of "JY" tower with responsibilities toward the train-wire, signal lights, and semaphores—and all his senses were hungry for railway America.

Austin desired forever to feel the satiny touch of stylus to train-order tissue forms, to hear the singing, shouting, roaring approach of fast trains, and to taste the very dust pungently swirling behind these man-made hurricanes. He took delight in the aroma of the red-hot stove when winter's white breath coated the hermetically sealed office-windows; he enjoyed the sight of heat-haze dancing along the polished rails in the blinding summer sunshine

But now, in his own familiar office, and when he least expected disaster, he had fallen victim to a rampant, bellowing "bull"—a mistake in a message. Operator Irby had the painful sensation of being tossed clear out of his conceit; he was hurt in every ramification of his ego.

The telegraphic error was of no material damage, but rapidly became the uproarious weapon of every unfeeling railroader that passed within shouting distance of the tower.

"Cow heels!" they shouted, and each time the boy told himself with growing determination. "Good-by to JY!"

Austin, in his calmer moments, found great difficulty in deciding who was responsible for this unbearable embarrassment. He had copied the telegram and—although Samuel Finley Breese Morse invented the telegraph more than eighty years ago—there is no authentic record of a receiving operator acknowledging full blame for a bull

If the sender did not confess the mistake, then there was wire trouble due to lightning, rain, fog, hail, or snow, or some mysterious fault in the equipment.

"Old Morse might have made a symbol to separate words the way they look in print," Operator Irby thought, darkly, "instead of relying on fool senders to put in their own spaces. Dog-gone it!"

But that seemed a harsh judgment to pass on a prominent scientist, now deceased, and the boy veered around into a direct criticism of an obscure but much alive individual.

"Darn 'Hungarian Joe'!" he muttered morosely. "It's really the fault of a track-walker and not an operator"—which shows how far afield a conscientious receiver will go in locating the guilty one responsible for a bulled message.

Austin had been alighting each evening in front of his tower while the accommodation train was slowing down for its stop at the station one hundred yards beyond. His method was the approved one of railroaders, facing forward and swinging out from the car with feet well advanced for impact with the ground and then running forward until momentum ceased.

His pride in this manly accomplishment was vast until one fateful morning, just before going off duty, he witnessed an alighting even more impressive.

The performer was a foreigner, squat and dark, and he not only had both arms festooned with railroad lanterns, but each hand clutched a bunch of signal flags.

He jumped off backward!

Operator Irby shouted a warning from his tower window, but the man already had left the still rapidly moving train. The boy expected the next instant to see a human pin-wheel go whirling over the cinders, throwing off a pretty shower of red and green lamps and flags.

Instead, the fellow's feet firmly struck and held the ground as his body leaned far forward. He slowly straightened up without stirring from his tracks, his back still to the train, and then turned aside and entered the lower half of the tower where were stored the track-walker's supplies.

Austin ran down the steps two at a time to interview the survivor.

"Say, old man," he said earnestly, "don't try that stunt again. You'll break your neck the next time! Hit the grit the way I do—frontward."

The track-walker silently arranged the lanterns and flags in their appointed places, then gently but firmly shouldered the operator outside the door and locked it. He was an extremely muscular specimen, the boy sensed, but his face was flat and wooden in expression, and much pock-marked.

"No spik Ingliss!" the foreigner remarked softly.

"You don't have to speak English to understand what I'm saying!" Austin informed him, angrily raising his voice. "Get off a train this way—"

He gave a graceful pantomime of the frontward method of alighting, and then nodded his head violently.

"That's the correct style," he asserted; "not this way—"

He made a purposely clumsy imitation of a misguided person leaving a moving train back first, and vigorously shook his head.

The track-walker now did some lively head-shaking himself.

"*Na dobra!*" he said.

"What's that?" the boy demanded.

"No good!" was the quick response, the speaker evidently in much conceit over the translation into Ingliss.

He staged a counter-pantomime of an awkward face-forward alighting and then a clever back one.

"*Dobra!* Good!" he explained. "Me Hungarian Joe. Yiss!"

Then he thumped himself resoundingly on his barrel of a chest, bowed right and left to an invisible multitude of spectators, and half ran, half skipped down the track to the near by station

"Remember what I said!" Operator Irby shouted after him, and then realized that he was wasting breath on a "No spik" foreigner.

"He's crazy!" he said to himself. "Loony as a bat! But he certainly knows how to get off a moving train with both arms full. Now, I wonder—I just wonder if I—"

He continued to wonder throughout the morning meal in the presence of his foster mother, aged Granny Mowrey, and her eleven-year-old grand-daughter, Agnes Helene Mowrey, who was his make-believe sister. Austin was the small family's chief support, and twice a day all three of its members marveled at the strangeness of his supper-time being the breakfast hour of the women folk, and their supper hour his breakfast-time

That is one of the distinctions of a night man. Day operators have nothing like it. poor souls.

But the boy did not mention Hungarian Joe's exploit and its fascination. Agnes Helene might have understood, but Granny Mowrey would not have been sympathetic.

"Niver flip th' cars, me lad, either gettin' on or off," she several times had issued warning. "Sure, thim's hobos' thricks!"

But Operator Irby continued to wonder in his dreams this day, aloft in the quiet attic room that was so well adapted to a night man's slumbers. He saw himself alighting backward from the speed-mad Limited Mail to the plaudits of an assembled concourse of foreign track-walkers.

And well might they cheer, because he carried in his arms all of Granny's dishes, pots and pans—and did not drop even a coffee cup.

But when that evening's accommodation train began to check speed for the JY station stop, it was a distinctly nervous Austin who shoved an arm through the handle of his lunch-basket and prepared to do or die from the rear platform of the last car. He swung out, back first, and struck the cinders just in front of the tower with both feet, exactly as Hungarian Joe had done.

But there the resemblance ended. The foreigner had bowed far forward, and if the American had weighed this detail its significance would not have been lost on him. "A track-walker did it," he subconsciously assured himself; "now, watch an operator improve on the thing!"

The native proudly stood erect, if only for an instant. Then he rolled over and over like a hare shot in full flight and finally lay quite still on his back.

The boy was not stunned or even painfully hurt, but he was seeing many new marvels in the sky. Daylight still endured, but, in addition to flocks of shooting-stars, planets were playing leapfrog with one another, and a new-born Milky Way was effervescing into sparks and colorful haze more suggestive of a Fourth of July celebration than the majestic calm of the celestial system.

The day man rushed down from the tower and assisted Night Operator Irby to arise.

"Who threw you off the train?" he demanded excitedly.

"Hungarian Joe!" Austin answered truthfully

"You're raving! Joe quit this morning and went out on Number Nine to join the circus."

"Join the what?"

"Circus, I said. He's a performer, an acrobat; does the double flip-flop and everything. Works on the road during his off seasons, that's all."

"That explains the whole darn thing!" the boy muttered bitterly.

"Explains what?"

"The big difference between *dobra* and *na dobra!*" Austin replied, and would hold no further conversation on the subject.

Alone in his tower he examined the lunch basket. Its contents miraculously were intact

"I didn't even crack a shell!" he mused proudly, viewing the two hard-boiled eggs. "Circus acrobat, eh? Well, if Hungarian Joe ever gets off a train and does as many back flip-flops as I did, I'll bet he breaks his neck!"

It was at this lofty moment that the treacherous telegraphic bull prepared to charge headlong over the wire and burst into JY office with eyeballs gleaming, nostrils distended, and tail curled. The swift sender who succeeded Operator Irby at the terminal freight office began to call like a house afire.

"JY, JY, JY!" he whizzed. "FO!"

"I (aye) I, I," the boy answered insolently; "g a (go ahead) fast, JY!"

The sender, spurred to his maximum speed, shot out with instructions for a way-freight conductor, and just as Austin put pencil to pad the addressee, himself, yelled up the tower stairs:

"Hey, operator, any orders?"

This man liked to pretend that his plebeian train, consisting of a discarded passenger-type engine, several nondescript freight-cars, and an antediluvian caboose, required specific orders from the lordly despatcher for every one of its many stops and starts.

The unflattering truth was that the way-freight usually received a mere message with routine instructions, and had to dodge from siding to siding like a hunted thing

and lurk on isolated spurs until the aristocratic scheduled trains dashed past on the main line. Even slow, mile-long extra freights sometimes forced him to go into hiding.

"Yep! Come up for your message!" Operator Irby shouted down, and hurriedly finished the scribbling of the following weird communication:

CONDR WAY FRT.
Take one car cow heels from JY siding to roundhouse

The first and only doubt that struck the receiver's mildly puzzled brain was: "How can cows' heels be distinguished from bulls' hoofs?" His bland conclusion was this. "Probably by the smaller size or daintier shape."

Engrossed in that interesting hypothesis, he did not ask himself: "Of what possible use could they be to the roundhouse?"

Austin gave the telegram to the conductor and curiously watched him as he inspected the string of freight-cars on the siding, one after another, in a vain search of heels. Then he saw the puzzled man scratch his head over the hidden meaning of the message; the engineer and the fireman alighted and scratched their heads; the brakeman sauntered up and scratched the brakeman's head, and young Mr. Irby up in the tower scratched the operator's head in sympathetic wonder as to the cause of that general bewilderment.

Finally the boy ran down to the ground, and there, on the very first gondola-car next to the main track, was a placard that fairly shouted, if it did not shriek, with its: "Co. Wheels."

"Company wheels'" he gasped. "Only car wheels and trucks! Oh, oh-h-h-h' I'm up against it now!"

His first mad impulse was to tear off that denunciatory sign and destroy it. Then he could notify the baffled conductor to disregard the instructions; at all hazards the bulled telegram ought to be taken away from him.

Later the much-imposed-upon receiving-operator would rewrite the telltale missive for the next way-freight crew that came along.

But by now the trainmen had unitedly scratched their senses together, and suddenly they guffawed in chorus and bent double with merriment. They surrounded the boy, thumped his back cordially and proffered chewing-tobacco.

He could not dodge their heavy hands, but he declined the weed with bitter thanks

"Company wheels—cow heels!" the engineer exclaimed. "Bub, you're a genius! You fooled us all for a few minutes"

"That's the way the ham sent it!" Austin shouted defensively. "I'll knock him cold if we ever meet!"

"When this here message is framed, Bill," the conductor brutally assured him, "it 'll be the masterpiece of the roundhouse. We'll put it right in the middle of our rogue's gallery of operators' bulls. Bill, you're a wonder!"

The brakeman, who had a turn for poesy, made up right on the spot a parody of a somewhat ribald song, as follows:

"Oh, you little Cow Heel Billy,
Here's a 'bull' 'll knock you silly,
While you're balling up
The company's biz!"

The fireman said nothing, but sardonically chewed his cud and spat sarcastically right and left.

Then the engine, snickering and bubbling amusedly with its steamy exhausts, was coupled on to that gondola load of accursed company wheels and trucks, and went away snorting derisively. The brakeman, safely esconsed in the caboose cupola, made unpoetic, uncouth, twiddling motions at the night operator.

"If I was five years older," Austin mused murderously, "and fifty pounds heavier, I'd knock the entire crew cold—and that cinder hound in the pigeon loft would be the first to feel my mighty right.

"Dog-gone the luck! No wonder the message was bulled. First, Hungarian Joe. Second, a wild sender. Third, that fool conductor yelling for orders. It wasn't my fault at all!"

Then a reassuring thought came to him—they evidently did not know his name;

they called him Bill and Billy. He was unaware that the poetic brakeman had taken his cue from the conductor, who called all men Bill before he learned their true names, just as other thoughtless persons quietly offend sailors by nicknaming them "Jack," privately annoy Chinamen with "John," and secretly insult Italians by assuming that their only masculine given name is "Tony."

Moreover, the engineer had been reduced to calling him "Bub," that universal slander of boyhood; and the tobacco-eating fireman could not find even one word to identify him.

But in the immediately succeeding twelve-hour trick, Operator Irby was undeceived as to his immunity. Conductors, engineers, firemen, and brakemen, coming from the eastern roundhouse, began to enrage the night man of JY tower, both in the sign language and by word of mouth. That fiend of a way-freighter evidently had posted the bulled telegram on the bulletin board.

"Billy Bull!" they shouted. "Bully Bill! Moo-o-o-o, cow, m-m-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-!"

The crowning indignity came at dawn when a mile long extra freight crawled in from the west and stopped with the huge, grimy engine abreast of the tower. The conductor and engineer came up to beg permission of the despatcher to turn out on the main line and go into the yard ahead of other slow trains blocked on the freight track.

This particular crew had been thirty hours on the trip, they said, what with poor steaming coal and a series of hot journal boxes. The whole crew was dog-tired, they added, and "DI" ought to have a heart.

DI office had a heart, but even as Austin held out the order form for the signatures of the conductor and engineer, he saw that the front brakeman, atop a box car next the engine, was not as weary as he should have been.

This individual was bull-like in build, broad and thick, and he wore solid black even to his shirt. It showed neither soot nor cinders, and, therefore, was of the type deservedly known as the "front brakeman" or "chimney sweep" shirt.

He glared at the windows of JY tower with his head outstretched. "Mm-m-m-m! Boo-o-o-o-o-o!" he muttered, challengingly, in imitation of a bull.

Then he slowly but strongly scraped each foot backward as if the angry animal were tossing dust or turf over its shoulders. The man knew nothing about Austin Irby's telegraphic mishap; this exhibition merely was his favorite pantomime, and he created in beholders a vivid mind-picture of a Polled Angus gentleman cow.

The unseeing conductor and engineer, red-eyed from lack of sleep, stumbled down the stairs to their posts of duty. The boy waited until the train was in motion, and then he had his say from the window.

"Hello, there, Dirty Shirt!" he yelled. "Give it a bath with a cake of dog-soap! The board of health is after you!"

The bull shook his invisible horns in mimic anger and made a pretended charge the length of the car. And the last thing Austin saw of him as the head of the train rolled around the curve was a slow, strong, maddening scrape of the hoofs.

"That settles it!" Operator Irby murmured resignedly. "If an absolute stranger in a shirt that maybe hasn't been washed for a month can make reflections on a man because he works in JY tower, it's time for me to get another position!"

When that morning's accommodation train reached the city the boy did not hurry home to eat supper in the breakfast hour of his admiring womenfolk, white-haired Granny Mowrey and brown-braided Agnes Helene. Instead, he strolled to within good viewing distance of the despatcher's office and lurked there with the intention of waylaying Vic Ryan, copier on the first trick, 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., his former teacher of telegraphy and present good friend.

Mr. Ryan was the fastest sender and the best receiver on the road; and Austin also believed him to be the quickest thinker, although somewhat advanced in years, in fact, all of twenty-three if not going on twenty-four.

Vic appeared at 7.59, and as he was about to enter the building the boy softly overtook him, tapped his right shoulder,

and swiftly stepped toward the left. The copier, not to be fooled even in an absorbed moment, turned to the left and held out his hand

"'Lo, Austie!" he said. "How's tricks?"

"Punk!" Operator Irby replied. "I'm sick of JY. It's a stick-in-the-mud job I want to see some of the wor.d'"

Vic Ryan was not the man to question a friend's motives

"Come back about nine thirty," he suggested; "that 'll give me time to fix it up with the division operator. We're short an emergency man to fill in nights-off and sick-relief from here to Crestville. How about you?"

"Fine and dandy!" Austin exclaimed. "I'll be back right after I eat."

He stood there alone for a full minute, lost in a day dream of high adventure along the one hundred and fifty miles of the division, until the third-trick-despatcher's copier dashed out of the building at 8.01 and bumped into him.

"Whoa, Bill!" the man exclaimed innocently. "Oh, it's you, Irby! How's tricks?"

Austin glared. The nickname Bill now was definitely on his nerves.

"Everything's O. K. out on the line where we work twelve hours a night; but it isn't safe to stand around DI when an eight-hour man is going off duty!" he said witheringly, and went home to inform his foster mother and his make-believe sister that the road was in dire need of his services as an emergency man. The position paid more than a regular job in a tower, and he would get to see some of the world

"Oh, Austin, isn't that just grand!" little Agnes Helene exclaimed delightedly; "you may get a chance to prevent a wreck!"

"Remimber, lad," old Granny said, "to wear yer rubbers rainy days, kape yer overcoat buttoned tight at th' nick when it's cowld weather—an' demand fresh bedclothes wheriver ye go. Jist say to th' boordin'-house landleddy, diplomaticlike: 'Oi ixpict th' same accommydations here that Oi get in me own home, which is as clane as a new pin!'

"An' hilp yerself to plenty av butther; take sugar in yer coffee—an' crame, too, if they have ut. Act as if ye are an Oirish gintleman in an English hotel; don't let thim give ye anny th' worst av ut, do ye hear?"

"Yes, Granny," the boy replied dutifully; but he was engrossed in the imminent prospect of seeing new vistas, unfamiliar towns, strange faces. He should have an annual pass good on anything that rolled, from the electric-lighted, steam-heated, vestibuled trains to the wind-swept deck of a section gang's hand-car. It all was alluring to him.

Emergency Operator Irby's first assignment was a two-week's vacation relief in a small, serene, Ohio town. He alighted there from the train at exactly 6 P.M., and as he walked into the station telegraph-office, the day man fairly ran out. He evidently was one of those impatient persons who refuse to work more than seven hundred and twenty minutes a day.

Inside the operating-room were four students, each older than Austin and severally his superior in physique. There were four office chairs, or one apiece for the beginners, and none for the newcomer.

Monopolizing the four telegraph instruments, two of the hams were absorbedly practising sending while the other pair hungrily hearkened to the clicking sounders on the other two wires.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" Operator Irby remarked pleasantly to their backs. "I'm the relief man here for two weeks at night."

Not one of the busy young men replied, and they gave him only fleeting glances over their shoulders. His caste was higher than theirs, but he might prove to be an interloper—and they outnumbered him.

The boy stood there for a long two minutes, resting his weight first on one foot and then the other, and becoming more incensed every second. He was considering the advisability of knocking cold all four of those insolent students when one of them said aloud:

"'Buck' ought to be here by now."

The others looked at the clock, and then all four turned to stare at the stranger.

"I hope he takes him!" their spokesman added, quite evidently referring to the emergency man as "him."

His three confederates nodded gloomily with the same mysterious wish, and all of them turned back to their exclusive practising.

"I'll be game," Austin told himself, "and not ask these unmannerly cubs who is 'he.' I suppose it's the sheriff or a drunken bully—or maybe they have a town murderer in this one-horse place!

"Well, I never committed a crime that should interest the authorities; I'll say yes or no—maybe I'd better make it yes, sir or no, sir every time the drunkard expects an answer, and as for the man-slayer, I'll tell him I'm the only support of a large family and all its members are murderers at heart. I'll be game, I will!

"Dog-gone these impertinent hams, anyhow! If they're trying to kid me I'll have 'em fired out of the office. This looks more like a telegraph school than a railroad operating-room.

"Darn it! I feel like the keeper of a private mad-house. Wish I had a little riot-gun or an ax or something!"

At that moment a ferocious barking and baying sounded outside the station door. The boy started violently, but braced himself as the others expectantly faced toward the door.

He knew that only the more terrible crimes called for tracking with blood hounds, and his case was mistaken identity—unless he unknowingly was a peculiarly accomplished sleep-walker. Here was High Adventure with capital H A!

Then a large framed, fresh-faced country youth bounded into the office. He stared appraisingly at Operator Irby, and a jovial grin slowly spread over the pink features. The emergency man evidently was a city boy, but he appeared to be human, nevertheless.

"Howdy, mister!" the native shouted, grasping the boy's trembling hand in a gorillalike grip. "I'm Buck! You're the relief man, eh? Well, come on! It's a good open night, and we ought to catch a couple of 'em!"

Meanwhile the hound pack roared and howled just off stage, but Austin took a great breath of relief. He was to be one of the pursuers instead of the pursued. However, he could not grasp why a night operator should be expected to aid in the vengeance of the law.

"I'd be pleased to help you in bringing them to justice," he informed the genial Buck, "but, unfortunately, I have to be on the job here."

"Oh, no you don't!" the ham spokesman announced cordially; "we four students do that. The regular man goes out after 'em every good tracking night."

"Did he ever catch any of the villains?" the boy inquired cautiously.

"You bet!" Buck replied enthusiastically. "He's no Jonah! So far this winter we've taken an even dozen coons and—"

"Coons!" young Mr. Irby gasped nervously. The only coon of his personal acquaintance was the aged negro porter back in DI who advertised himself as having been a bad actor with a razor in his Mississippi levee days.

It might be just their luck this night to overtake a lively young one armed with a newly honed, non-safety weapon. Moreover, Austin recently had read "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and his mood was ethically opposed to this bloodhound business.

"Yessiree," Buck continued; "and four possums!"

Then the emergency man finally understood that the subject was not lynching, but hunting, and he was keen to take up the chase and bring the villains to justice.

"My name is Irby," he informed Buck, and again risked his fingers within a hand like a pipe-wrench.

"What's the last name?"

"That's it."

"What's the first name?"

"Austin."

"Well, you see, Austin, it's this way," the young coon hunter explained. "The regular night operator told me to keep you entertained while he was away getting married up in Canada, and in addition to that my dogs insist on coming here before they go into the woods.

"They seem to think that a telegraph-operator is a pretty good mascot, and if

you prove to be one, I'll sure catch you a coon-skin cap. Come, let's turn 'Old Tune' and 'Butcher' loose! We'll be back by one or two in the morning, or maybe three or four."

Instead of the large pack that Austin imagined to be outside, Buck had only two dogs—an aged foxhound trailer and a young brindle bull for slaughtering purposes. The hunting equipment also included an ax, a pair of lineman's climbing spurs, and a lantern.

That first night Old Tune played old sleuth with four large he-coons, and, after he barked "treed," Buck shined their eyes with the lantern. When the animal was on a limb from which it could be shaken, Buck climbed with the spurs.

If the tree was hollow, Buck chopped with the ax. Meanwhile Austin mascotted.

All the ensuing nights of that two weeks were mild, with a damp, scent-retaining snow, and Buck was able to present his guest with enough pelts to make an overcoat.

Operator Irby thoroughly enjoyed the work at that Ohio railroad telegraph station. The regular man there may have gone away purely for the purpose of matrimony, as alleged, but the emergency relief would have wagered that he kept his eyes wide open while up in Canada for a new telegraph job, with another roomful of students, where the fur business was in full swing.

In the daytime the boy "put up" at the American House, just across the street from the station, and the attitude he assumed there would have delighted his foster mother. He argued for fresh linen and won the debate; he took sugar and butter in full measure and criticised the absence of cream, and he ate everything put before him, even in the little bird-bath dishes on the side, like a charter member of the Plate Polishers' Union.

But he wrote not a word about raccoons or opossums in his letters to Granny Mowrey. She had views directly opposite to those of the four students in regard to leaving the office in their charge, to say nothing of her lad pursuing innocent wild animals through the wet snow of the dark woods, and maybe leaving off his rubbers or forgetting to button his overcoat at the neck.

The little old Irish lady would have been even more perturbed if she had known that the ham quartet was teaching Austin the inner tricks of the shirker's shameful trade. He had the best traditions of the road to uphold, his father having been Engineer John Irby, who died at his post of duty, and Granny would have condemned any sleeping on the job as "an English thrick" even where there was no danger of train wreck.

The four students were as cunning as possums, although their appearance of being asleep was not entirely pretence—as Austin and Buck discovered several mornings on returning to the office around 3 or 4 A.M. They also were as wise as coons, as revealed by the fact that both semaphore signals would be turned white—"Safe, proceed!"—east and west for the double tracks when they wished to "pound their ears" on the company's time.

A piece of tin stuck upright in a rail joint was a precaution that later would tell them the direction a train had gone in the event that the tail lights disappeared before they fully awakened.

These sleep-seeking beginners gave much thought to the problem of inventing a private alarm with which to equip the telegraph sounder. They required an apparatus that would give off a piercing whistle or ring a thunderous gong when their particular call was made on the wire.

If success had crowned the quartet's discussions, so that the snoring ham would be aroused immediately when the pitiless train-despatcher called him, night work on the railroad at isolated stations would have virtually no drawback.

Operator Irby, himself, finally invented a sure-fire sleep interrupter that acted the instant a train passed his post of duty. He called it "the coal scuttle alarm or automatic auxiliary announcer," and firmly believed his invention was entitled to a basic patent. Old-timers in the telegraph business, however, will recognize that the young inventor merely had stumbled onto an already discovered scheme for the foiling of

the inexorable train sheet. To the graybeards and the bald-heads of the craft, active or retired, the thing is known as "the tin can and the string," "the bell cord and the coupling pin," or some other descriptive title commensurate to its constituent parts

For the benefit of the younger set among the Knights of the Key, the secret specifications of the Irby contrivance are here revealed, and full permission is given to all operators and agents to imitate it for personal use. Warning! The appliance must not be exploited commercially.

Austin had been sent to "MG," one hundred and seven mile siding, to play a one-night stand, and as he dropped off at noon from the caboose of a slow-moving extra freight, he saw that the office was a mere shanty, not much larger than a piano-box standing on end. The day man, a tall, thin, melancholy bachelor of forty, eyed him morosely from the office chair.

"How old are you?" he demanded forthwith.

"Going on sixteen," Austin answered promptly.

"Oh, that's all right then!" the man exclaimed, arising and offering a limp hand "You're to get your meals at the Prentice place, half a mile across the fields there. See it?"

"Yep," the boy replied, wondering what his age had to do with the situation.

"Old man Prentice is rich; he boards the MG force merely as a favor to the road," the day operator continued; "but we return the favor by permitting him to load his live stock right here on the siding. Understand?"

"Uhuh!"

"Well, here's one thing I wish you to remember: I'll cut the heart out of any man that bothers Belle!"

That startling announcement did not satisfy the speaker's emotion.

"Yes, I'll kill him!" he added, feelingly; "I'll make mince-meat of him if he bothers Belle"

Austin assumed that "Belle" was a favorite mare or perhaps a choice cow, this being an agricultural environment, but he felt sure that the day man was a lunatic.

"Where's the regular night operator?" he inquired diplomatically.

"He went in to town this A.M. to get his eye painted and to buy a revolver," the tall man explained; "I beat him up yesterday evening for bothering Belle!"

"I guess I'll go eat!" the boy remarked nervously, and hurried away toward the farmhouse. In the intervening fields there were both horses and cows, and he made wide détours to avoid any chance of "bothering Belle."

Farmer Prentice not only was rich in live stock and acres, but he had three daughters to make his home useful and ornamental. They were expert housekeepers, and natural beauties, aged eighteen, twenty, and twenty-two, and all three were amazed and amused at the extreme youth and verdancy of the emergency man. He, therefore, had three charming and capable, but deeply disturbing waitresses at this midday meal

"Sugar in your coffee, Mr. Irby?" the youngest girl inquired sweetly. She was a brilliant blonde.

"N-no, thanks; I—I never use it!" Austin stammered, suddenly possessed with the queer idea that a frugal attitude would enhance his social value.

"Cream?" the middle sister asked him. She, too, had baby-blue eyes, but was not so golden of hair as her younger sister.

"P-plain black!" he replied.

"I made this butter myself," the oldest daughter said. She was a striking contrast to her sisters, being a brunette with great dark eyes and a crown of sable hair. Her voice made Austin tinkle inside as if his chest were strung with wires—but he ate his bread straight.

After the horror of that quarter-eaten meal was over, with its gentle feminine joking, delicious giggling and silvery laughter, the self-conscious Mr Irby was lured by the brunette heart-breaker into skating on the ice of the near-by fish-pond. The two other sisters had driven in to town on a shopping tour.

Austin wore a pair of girls' skates, but he was a graduate of the Allegheny Public Park Skaters' School, and Miss Prentice lavished glances and voice on him as a re-

ward for his grace and skill. When five o'clock came he was ravenously hungry, but assured her that he could not eat a bite.

"Not even a piece of my pumpkin-pie?" she inquired seductively; "I'm going to pack your midnight lunch, you know. You'd better try a sample."

"Well, I might take a very small piece!" he agreed, starvation partly ousting bashfulness.

When she placed before him a large, thick quarter section of the golden-brown delicacy, he squared himself in the chair and made ready with the fork. Miss Prentice smiled distractingly to her young cavalier and sang for him, in an alto voice of much caress, a verse of the countryside song appropriate to the occasion:

"When I was a child not three feet high,
I fell in love with pumpkin pie;
I gave my mother lots to do
Making pies for me to chew!"

"What—what's your first name?" he asked shyly.

"Belle," she answered encouragingly.

The boy hurriedly put down the fork. This particular landlady was darned good-looking and dog-gone entertaining, but there was that insane day man who cut rivals into mince-meat or blacked their eyes.

"I—I guess I'd better not eat now!" he said miserably; "been something wrong with my appetite lately."

"Why, Mr. Irby, you're real white! Are you ill?" Miss Prentice demanded solicitously, as he dodged away from the tender hand with which she meant to learn whether his brow were fevered

"Uhuh!" he muttered ungallantly. "I'll go out in the open air while you pack the lunch bucket."

When he approached MG office the day man strode forward and met him at the right-of-way fence with an inquiry full of meaning.

"Well, I suppose you think Belle is the only one of the Prentice girls worth having, eh?" he demanded.

Austin replied craftily with a quotation from his good friend, Copier Vic Ryan, a dark-complected connoisseur of feminine pulchritude.

"I'm a lifelong admirer of the blond type among women!" he declared with an assumed enthusiasm. Vic had not met Belle!

The day man again shook hands.

"I wish you were the regular night operator here!" he said earnestly.

As soon as the jealous suitor disappeared toward the farmhouse, the boy examined the luncheon prepared by the desirable Miss Prentice.

There was enough for even a famished skater, including two pieces of the best pumpkin pie that ever passed his lips. The bread of the roast beef and chicken sandwiches was buttered in spendthrift fashion, and the coffee in the cupola cup was heavily sugared and nearer gold than brown with cream.

"Belle!" he whispered to himself, too full of her cooking and the memory of her eyes and her voice to talk aloud; "gee, that's a pretty name! Belle—Belle Irby!

"Nope! Not while the day operator has a knife and the regular night man carries a revolver! But, maybe they'll slaughter each other before morning. I'd take the day job here, of course, so I could spend my evenings at the farmhouse. And maybe the new night operator would be a married man and live in town!"

With that cheering reflection he turned to a critical survey of the office. The stove was of pocket size, but white-hot to combat the frosty evening, and the boy realized unreservedly that his sleep would be sound in this cozy den. He could turn the semaphore signals "white," of course, and place his trusty piece of tin in a rail jointure—but these palliatives did not seem enough against the prospect of an endless night.

He would have welcomed landslides east and west to carry down the wires and cut him off from all communication with the outside world, but the Pittsburgh-West was not built for that convenience even if it had been the season for a great thaw.

It was not until 10 P.M., when he was yawning terrifically, that the wonderful idea came to Inventor Irby and the coal scuttle alarm sprang into existence.

Under the child's size telegraph-table was a lineman's outfit containing a roll of copper wire. With the pliers Austin worried off a shining length and began to fashion a contrivance of which Thomas A. Edison, the great telegrapher and also an inventor, might well have been proud in his salad days.

He ran the wire out through the top crack of the shanty door over the farthest rail of the double tracks and coiled the end of it there to a nail driven into the tie Then he made string loops around the wire at the several intervening spike-heads until the copper strand lay nearly flat across the rail-field

The lantern-light was none too bright, and the chill air numbed his fingers into making knots that should have been more secure, but he enjoyed the task and hummed merrily to himself as much as he could remember of Belle Prentice's pumpkin-pie melody.

On the office or business end of the wire the boy attached the coal scuttle for noise-producing purposes and drew it up shoulder high. Then he stood for fully five minutes with a gentle grin of pride on his face.

The alarm, complete, unerring, inescapable, awaited only the touch of an intruding wheel. His entirely plausible theory was that if a train dashed past on either track while he slept, she would cut the wire, it would slip shantyward through the string loops, the bucket could not avoid a noisy tumble—and he would be startled into wakefulness.

Thereafter he should promptly OS—"Oyez!" her, and every one on the circuit would believe that the emergency man at MG was hopelessly inflicted with insomnia. As far as the train-sheet record was concerned, he had the despatcher tied hand and foot.

It was 11 P.M. when Austin completed the installation of the admirable alarm and his admiring thereof, and he decided that his tired eyes required an immediate closing

"I'll lie down, but stay just about half awake," he told himself. "I'm not really sleepy now, and I want to see my automatic auxiliary announcer get in its fine work! Wish I knew how to take out a patent. Can't trust lawyers. No, siree!

"Gee, it's only eleven two. Ho, ho-h-h-h, humph-h h-h!"

At that time the train within nearest striking distance was Number Eleven, the westbound Limited Mail, and she two and a half hours away. He stretched out luxuriously on the narrow telegraph-table and abruptly fell into a deep, untroubled slumber.

At one minute of midnight, Vic Ryan, no longer a mere copier, but this very day appointed to be the third-trick despatcher, came on duty in DI. He was not conceited over his elevation, but thoroughly sure of himself; he knew the train schedule by heart, and the book of rules likewise, and could visualize every mile of the division as a result of personal inspection.

Moreover, traffic was comfortingly light this night; the extra freights were nearing their destinations, and Number Eleven was right on time and half-way over his 150-mile guardianship.

But at 12.15 A.M. the gods of chance began to stack the cards against the new despatcher. An insignificant, bobtailed yard engine managed to split a switch and block the eastbound track at "EF," a small city five miles east of Austin Irby's sleeping-quarters.

The crew reported that they could get her back on the rail in a jiffy with no other implements than crowbars. There was nothing in this trifling mishap to worry Despatcher Ryan.

At 12.58, however, Vic had real work to do. The superintendent telephoned from his bedside to prepare a special at Crestville, the western end of the division, to carry a rich man and his wife to Allegheny as fast as wheels could turn

"I just had 'em both on the long-distance," the master of the road said. "They're close friends of mine, and it's a case of life or death, they tell me. Their son was badly hurt to-night—automobile accident. He's in a Pittsburgh hospital.

"Clear the line for 'em, Mr. Ryan; sidetrack everything. Good night!"

The Crestville millionaire, a large, ag-

gressive but not unkindly man, already had interviewed the old yardmaster there in regard to a special, looking him in the eye and explaining that the superintendent was a valued friend of the family.

The railroader did not stampede. He was sympathetic, recognizing the emergency, and promising to make up a private train with great promptness—after an official instruction came from his superior over the company's telegraph wire and not a minute sooner.

Then the millionaire's wife, a small, soft-spoken woman, made her way—alone and apologetically—into the office of the yardmaster. If she had meant to offer a bribe to him, she changed her mind at sight of the white-haired gentleman in overalls and jumper who swiftly arose and offered her his chair.

Instead, she gently clutched his coat-sleeve to detain him, and began to chat about her son as if to an equal who was interested in the ways of children.

"I must not cry or beg any favor of this man," she told herself. "He recognizes no authority but that of the railroad, and my tears or arguments would crystallize his sense of duty. But, I'll find the way to show him what is in my heart!"

When the boy was very small, she declared, his ambition was to be a brakeman on the Pittsburgh-West Division, and carry a hickory stick to make the wheels squeal like pigs caught under a gate.

"I'll bet he had a train of cars to play with!" the yardmaster volunteered, not showing the slightest suspicion of the woman's apparent guile in connecting a sentiment for the road with her urgent necessity

"Yes, sir; he had!" the mother assented eagerly, never dreaming that she was replying to a veiled sarcasm. "And when the engine broke down he used to raise the track at one end and run the train by gravity."

To himself the old railroader exclaimed: "Why, she's telling the truth!" and aloud he inquired: "How old is he now?"

"Nearly nineteen," the woman answered, and she went on, hesitatingly: "He's as tall as his father, and—and full of life. But he always drove his runabout carefully; the steering-gear must have broken and—"

Her voice died away and she stared out the window to where other railroaders were moving about with lanterns in the black night. At that very moment they ought to be busily preparing the special for its running orders—and she was unable to find the miracle words that would inspire them.

"She's lying, now," the yardmaster mused. "She says her son is 'full of life,' and that means 'a wild young waster!' I'll bet he was joyriding when the automobile overturned. Yes, she's lying—but, good Lord, isn't that just like a mother!"

And with that thought he suddenly stepped to the doorway and shouted into the darkness. All the near-by lanterns stopped moving while the ruler of the yard issued his commands, and then they made streaks of light in various directions.

"I never had a train of cars to play with when I was a boy," the yardmaster explained to the millionaire's wife; "but I'll see what I can do right now with a life-size Type X engine, a steel day-coach, and a Pullman. It takes that much weight to hold her to the rail when you have an engineer that 'll hit it up to ninety miles an hour!"

That is why the special was ready when the superintendent's instructions came over the wire. The running order from Despatcher Ryan followed immediately, and she rolled out of the Crestville station at 1.01 A.M.

The law meant nothing to her; while still within the city limits she reached the roar and rattle of a sixty-mile gait. In the open country the engineer, justifying the yardmaster's praise, began to reach out for a new mile every forty seconds.

And it was not until 1.15 that Vic Ryan recalled with a start that something had been wrong at EF station, and his log should show that it now was O. K

"When did that yard engine get on?" he asked the operator there.

"Minute, see," was the response.

It was a long two minutes before the troublesome news came. The members of the crew were still trying with their large

crowbars, but their opinion now was that a small wreck-train would better be sent to aid them.

"Hold No. 11 at your distant signal," the new despatcher ordered instantly.

The EF man hurriedly pulled the lever to "Danger, stop!"—and in his haste did not feel that the long wire yielded much too readily. The normal position of the semaphore was vertical, "Safe, proceed!" and investigation later disclosed that the wire had broken in its wooden conduit and scraped against the sides with about half the usual resistance to the lever

That was another marked card against Despatcher Ryan, a "Safe" signal 2,000 feet east of the station, and a lever at "Danger" in the office itself

Then an order went to EF and "BJ," the latter town twelve miles west of Austin Irby's impromptu boudoir, to switch the eastbound special on to the west track around the derailed yard engine. It was a simple maneuver, but annoying, because it meant a reduction in the record-breaking speed of a life-or-death train

The special was stopped at BJ at 1.22 A.M., received the order, and began to cross over to the west track. At the same time the Limited Mail, running at an even sixty mile gait, passed the false "Safe" distant signal of EF and thundered on toward the station.

The engineer, with the white light registered on his consciousness, observed other white signals where the crew of the derailed yard engine labored with their futile crowbars, and drove steadily ahead.

The operator saw the headlight near at hand, doubted the evidence of his senses, questioned the very fact of his "home" semaphore being red, spasmodically pulled it to Safe, and then frantically back to Danger.

The fireman, glancing from the coal-box, caught that fleeting white glare and it satisfied his caution.

The EF man leaped to the key.

"No. 11 gone—" he began, and would have added: "She ran by both my red signals!" but Vic Ryan took the wire

"BJ," he flashed; "stop Spl.!"

The wire remained closed an agonizing ten seconds, and then the operator there said:

"I dropped the board, but she went on! I tried to swing her down with my lantern, too!"

Mr. Ryan made no comment on this additional misfortune.

"MG," he said, confidently, "put No. 11 on siding. Give special clear track without fail"

There was no response.

"MG, MG, MG—DI!" he called desperately.

Silence again ensued on the train-wire.

"Who is on duty at MG?" Vic asked his copier, and added, in self-accusation, "I should have had him in on the order."

"Irby," the assistant read from the log-book. "Operator A. Irby, relief man, one night."

The new despatcher's face turned a shade whiter. In this great emergency, with two fast trains headed for each other on the same track, Austin Irby, his favorite, and the son of a railroad hero, was asleep at the key and blighting the one chance of averting a fatal wreck

"They'll meet on the straightaway and see each other in time to stop," the copier suggested hopefully.

"No," Mr. Ryan replied, staring at the clock, "it 'll be on the big curve three miles west of MG. The wreck-train will have worse work to do than lifting on that yard engine at EF. Get out the medical list, see what doctors and nurses are available at EF and BJ

"I've known both those engineers a long time. They ran freight when I was a call-boy at the roundhouse. Poor devils!"

He continued to call MG while every wideawake operator on the line listened tensely. "Pounding one's ear on the company's time" was a joking phrase among them; here was looming large the unrelieved tragedy that lurked in it.

Aboard the special the millionaire and his wife and the conductor were in the day-coach next the engine. Sleep was out of the question for the passengers, and the railroader felt that the lurching, swaying Pullman would be somewhat of a man-trap if it overturned.

The passengers broke a tradition of the road. Never before did any one beg for more speed on a Pittsburgh-West special train; always the layman made anxious inquiries of "Is it safe to run like this?" or some similar confession of fear.

"Are you doing your best?" the millionaire's wife had gently asked the conductor. "My boy may have been hurt worse than the hospital people said. I—I— If he dies without seeing us, we won't care to live, will we, father?"

"No, mother!" her husband promptly answered as he gripped the side of the seat to hold himself steady and looked out into the swirling night. "At this speed," he added gravely, "the telegraph-poles relatively are as close together as pickets in a fence. We couldn't leave the track without striking one of them."

His wife did not attempt to follow that trend of thought. She was sharply visualizing a hospital room or, worse yet, an operating-table whereon might lie the son of her heart.

The conductor glanced the length of the car. It was rocking violently, although this was a straightaway track.

"We are coming to a curve," he told the woman, "but if you wish I'll signal for no slackening there."

"Please!" she said.

He pulled the bell-cord twice, a whistle screamed in reply, and the roar of the huge engine became a sustained, monstrous growling.

The millionaire's wife smiled almost happily. Her gratitude was very great for the railroad men who were bending their every effort to carry with the maximum speed a loving father and mother to the death-bed of an only child.

And just ten miles away Operator Irby not only was asleep on his telegraph-table, but curling himself a bit closer, with knees toward chin, for a still deeper plunge into slumber. It was an instinctive move induced by a wave of cold air that welled in as the office door sagged partly open under the pull of a frost-tautened wire attached to a home-made awakener guaranteed to fool any despatcher.

He did not consciously hear the perfunctory whistle of No. 11's engine or the roar of her approach. Instead, those routine sounds were transmitted into a weird melodrama in his dreams.

It seemed that he was being pursued across the near-by fields by a maniac bachelor who shrieked in rage and shouted:

"I'll cut the heart out of any man that bothers Belle!"

The boy felt himself stumble, wildly put out a hand to recover, and thereby struck open the circuit breaker on the train-wire key—and the next instant he awakened with harrowing completeness.

Austin landed erect in the center of the floor and glanced fearfully about him. The piano-box office was vibrating on its foundation as if from the blow of a Titan, and the wide-open door was swinging in ghostly fashion.

The coal-scuttle alarm had disappeared.

Back in DI office the copier groaned in dismay when the train-wire mysteriously opened.

"They're together!" he gasped. "Knocked the poles down!"

Dispatcher Ryan shook his head slowly as he compared his watch with the master clock overhead.

"No!" he muttered, "they're still five minutes apart. But this isn't a careless opening of the wire; every man on the line —except Austin Irby—is right on the job."

Then and there the circuit closed. Operator Irby had observed the open key and swiftly shut it without revealing himself.

Instantly there came hurtling over the wire in the perfect Morse of Vic Ryan, his teacher and friend, a stirring command

"MG, stop No. 11!" it said. "Put her on siding. Let Special go east on west track. Hurry, for God's sake, Austie, or they'll meet head-on!"

The boy seized his lantern and rushed outside.

"Lord, *Lord!*" he groaned in horror. "She's gone!"

Not more than a half mile west of him were the tail lights of a train—and even as he watched them they appeared to become stationary. He fairly gulped in a great breath of relief and joy.

He madly gave the whirling signal to

back up. An answering white pin-wheel was swung by some one at the rear of the train. Then the engine whistle sounded a warning, and the tail lights began to move back toward the delighted watcher.

He darted into the office and changed his west semaphore from white to red. This was locking the stable after the horse had been stolen, but there still remained the cow.

His word would be as good as the engineer's when they were called in to "dance on the carpet" of the superintendent's office with their conflicting explanations.

Austin again dashed outside and signaled for a still swifter backing of the train, and then set the switch to put her on the siding.

"I must think fast now!" he told himself. "I was asleep on duty for one thing, and I have to outguess Vic for another—and that's no child's play!

"Where the dickens is my coal bucket and that length of copper wire? The alarm wakened me O. K., but what stopped No. 11?"

The Limited Mail was in to clear, with headlight dimmed, not a half minute before the special rocketed by. The tremendous air-pressure of that terrific flight beat against the cars of the side-tracked train like blows from a giant stave.

Number Eleven's conductor and engineer silently crowded into the tiny office with Operator Irby. The men's faces were drawn and their hands were shaking, but the boy was thoroughly under control. He merely nodded to his visitors and then pointedly became busy at the key.

"DI—MG!" he said sharply.

"I, g a!"—Aye! Go ahead!—was the swift, appealing answer.

"OS OS"—Oyez! Oyez!—Austin continued evenly. "Spl d—departed—east 1.29 on west track. No. 11 on siding. Any instructions? Crossed circuit in table wiring; couldn't get key open when—"

"Tell No. 11 to make up the time into Crestville," Despatcher Ryan broke in, "and no report will be necessary. Seven minutes late now."

"Hurrah!" the boy exclaimed inwardly. "Vic's not onto me yet!"

He blandly announced Mr. Ryan's instructions, but did not turn to face his perplexed audience.

"Young man, tell the despatcher your block was white!" the conductor blurted over Austin's shoulder. "Both my engineer and his fireman say so. But if you hadn't thrown your coal bucket into their cab they'd have gone into that special at full speed!

"We never expected to meet anything on the west track. Why wasn't your block red?"

Here the operator at EF made an opportune suggestion.

"MG, tell that engineer he ran by two danger signals here, distant and home!" he said.

"EF, forget it!" DI office said meaningly.

"Maybe Vic is on to me after all!" Austin mused, but he turned around and informed the engineer, soothingly: "You ran by two red blocks at EF, and my signal was as you see it now—at danger!

"You'd better have the fireman read signals with you and get into Crestville on time—and say nothing! I'm not going to make any report; I never snitch!"

The engineer for a few moments was at loss for words to refute the libel against his eyesight

"Why—why, sonny—" he began, and then burst into true talk. "When I see a red signal, I say to myself, 'Sunset!' When I see a white one, I say 'Fleecy cloud!'

"Those words register on my brain and I can't make a mistake. Your block was a fleecy cloud!"

"You pay too much attention to scenery and not enough to the job!" Operator Irby smilingly informed him. "You'll be ten minutes late leaving here. Go on; hit it up!"

The engineer hesitated at the door

"I want to say," he remarked awkwardly, "that a boy who can throw a coal scuttle into my cab when I'm doing sixty can kid me every time we meet!"

When he reached his engine he shouted back:

"If you'd missed us, we'd be dead men now!"

The fireman threw off the coal bucket as

Number Eleven hurriedly rattled from the siding. The scuttle was bent out of shape, but still serviceable if Austin had further use for an automatic auxiliary announcer—which he decidedly had not.

For the rest of that night he probably was the most wideawake young telegrapher in railway America. He heard, with considerable gratefulness, the OS OS of the Limited Mail arriving on time at Crestville, and the special reached the eastern terminus with a new high-speed record for the 150 miles.

Before dawn and the insanely jealous day man arrived, Operator Irby convinced himself that he not only had fooled Despatcher Ryan, but was somewhat of a hero to boot. If it had not been for his wonderful inventing of the coal-scuttle alarm, he reasoned, a tragic wreck would have occurred.

But at 5.59 A.M., one minute before he was off duty, all the wind was taken out of Austin's complacent sails.

"Run in to see me the first night you're off," Mr. Ryan suggested; "I've something on my mind!"

"O K!" the boy replied, but remarked at more length to himself:

"Dog gone the luck! I guess Vic is too slick for me! I'll take my time about seeing him. I wonder what became of that confounded copper wire?"

Not until a week later did he venture into DI office, and by that time he had rehearsed his story to the minutest inflection. Vic Ryan met him out in the hall and shook hands, but hardly with the old-time cordiality.

"Vibration had worn off the insulation just under the table—" Austin began, cheerfully.

"There was none at all on this piece of wire!" the despatcher abruptly remarked, taking from his pocket a message dated six days back. It read:

> Roundhouse, Crestville
> Twenty five feet heavy copper wire found wound on pony-truck axle, Limited's engine

"Nor on this one," Vic added. The second telegram was a complaint five days old from a lineman to the maintenance department, and said:

> Somebody stole twenty-five feet No 12 copper wire left two days ago in MG office

The boy began to breathe hard. If the western roundhouse and the eastern maintenance department got together with that accusing copper strand, he was trapped. He now saw his coal-scuttle alarm in its true catapult nature, with the wire lightly coiled about a spike head ready to strike like a rattlesnake at the slightest touch.

"Snitchers!" he exclaimed hotly. "Always trying to put everything onto the operator!"

"Those messages were not delivered," Mr. Ryan reminded him. "Tear 'em up! And here's a letter the Limited engineer asked me to give you."

Austin found inside the envelope a message blank with the following on the back:

> One good turn deserves another. I swiped this off the bulletin board. Turn over

On the opposite side was a specimen of Austin's own handwriting, and, after one glance, he rapidly tore it into tiny pieces.

"More snitching?" Vic inquired sympathetically.

"No, indeed!" the boy answered heartily, "I was wrong about that. We're all a happy family on the Pittsburgh-West."

"Shall I make the other members believe you're a hero, Austie?"

"No, indeed! I'm merely a reformed character. And I give you my word, Vic, I'll never pound my ear on the company's time again!"

"Good kid!" the young despatcher exclaimed, and he shook hands now in full friendship. "I knew you wouldn't lie to me when it came to a show-down! What did the engineer write?"

"Oh, nothing much!" the boy answered modestly and truthfully. He did not wish to burden Vic Ryan with the shop-talk involved in the last destroyed telegram. The front of it had read:

> Take one car cow heels from JY siding to roundhouse

# HIS FIGHTING NAME.

BY JACK BECHDOLT.

**Frank Wynne Started Something When He Called Ed Stovall "Skinny."**

BIG Frank Wynne, foreman of the salmon-trap at Rainier Spit, passing down the beach at Squamish, caught sight of a long, lathlike boy with bright red hair and an abundance of strawberry freckles, hunched up in the roots of an old madrone tree. The youngster was staring hypnotized into the warm haze that misted the placid expanse of Puget Sound.

Because he was big and good-natured, and because something wistful in the thin, day-dreaming face of the coltlike boy touched his heart, Wynne grinned up and called a careless, "Hello Skinny!" Without pausing for a reply he hurried on to join the cannery tender, waiting for him at Squamish dock.

A minute later something whizzed past Wynne's ear with a whistle like a spent rifle bullet. He wheeled to see the lanky day-dreamer, suddenly roused from his inertia, picking up another rock to launch in his direction.

"Easy there, Skinny," shouted Wynne, still grinning, and turned on his way. A rock spatted ahead of him, just shaving his shoulder. Wynne decided to ignore the attack. Another rock sang past his head Another kicked up the loose gravel at his feet

It is no easy task for the most self possessed man to keep his back to a small boy intent on hurling rocks. Dignified retreat in such a case provokes a queasy sensation in the small of the back that is entirely out of proportion to the actual danger of the situation.

Because he was grown up, good-natured and in a hurry, Wynne kept on his way five minutes, expecting each shot to be the last. He passed the little knot of bare wooden buildings which make up the business district of Squamish—and still rocks pursued him. He turned onto the long wharf, baking in the August sun, and a pebble knocked his straw hat over his eyes.

Wynne turned with sudden irritation. He expected to see his pursuer dodge hastily behind some building or lumber pile. But he was mistaken. The thin, red-haired avenger stood his ground in the middle of the road, his arm poised for another shot.

"Cut that out, kid!"

Wynne shook a menacing finger and walked on. A rock followed him.

Thoroughly angry at the red-headed mosquito, the foreman wheeled and started toward him on the run. Still the boy held his ground. As Wynne came closer he found his menacing stare answered by an unwinking regard from a pair of brown eyes made curiously prominent by what seemed an absence of brows, so closely did the arched red fringes match the boy's deep sunburn.

Wynne laid a heavy hand on the boy's shoulder and wondered at the fragile feel of the thin bones beneath his fist. His temptation to administer a shaking vanished instantly.

"Look here kid, what's the trouble between us?" he growled.

"You stop it, see?" his attacker panted angrily. The brown eyes looked suspiciously moist, but they were unabashed by Wynne's return staring.

"Stop it, what?"

"Don't you call me that, that's all. I won't stand it -I'll "

"Call you what—oh! Skin- -"

"You stop it, you big "

"So that's it, eh! Don't like that name?"

"No, I don't, and I'll lick anybody that calls me that again. You better "

"Say, listen, kid, how many fellows have you licked for calling you Skin—for calling you that—so far?"

The boy grinned shyly. "I licked three," he admitted, "and I'm after the fourth one, now."

"H-m! You mean me?"

"No, sir, a big kid, Tom Monroe. I've fought him three times and he's licked me so far, but I bet I'll cure him of calling me that before I quit."

"Good Lord, licked you three times and you're still fighting?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, say, what is your name—your right name?"

"Ed Stovall."

"Well, Ed -or do you prefer Mr. Stovall?—I don't want you on my trail, see? So I apologize—I beg your pardon, because I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Just to show you I'm really sorry I'll take you on a trip out to the trap on the tender if you want to go. You can come in with the boys at six o'clock. Want the ride?"

Ed Stovall indicated very clearly that he wanted the ride. When he returned at sunset, it was to tell his mother that he had been offered a job to last all vacation at the trap-men's camp, doing odd work for the cook.

Thus began Ed Stovall's association with Frank Wynne. At the age of fifteen, when his mother died, Ed gave up school and followed Wynne to Seattle for the winter, working for the Rainier Packing Company in the shipping department.

Ed Stovall did not return to Squamish for two years. In that time he felt he had blossomed into very much of a city chap. Working in the shipping department in winter, time keeping in summer, he had risen to the heights of a twenty-dollar-a-week salary and acquired wisdom of a sort.

Wynne, who had been promoted to the general management of the packing company, made it his business to see that the boy's education in worldly things did not outpace his years, but for all his well meant efforts Ed Stovall at seventeen showed no particular ambition to rise in the world. A time-keeping job suited his notions of genteel employment and pool-parlors and moving-picture shows in his leisure hours were to be preferred to a business education that might advance him.

Then, aged seventeen and outfitted with three complete and dazzling changes of raiment, Ed Stovall returned to patronize Squamish during two weeks of leisure afforded by his annual vacation.

It was the spring of the year. Apple orchards back of the trim, little, white-painted farms, filled the air with luxury. In the dooryard of old Captain Pearson's home two huge lilac-trees were in full bloom and against this background, coming out of the gate, Ed first saw Audrey Pearson.

The picture brought him to a full stop. Forgotten was the glory of his vacation raiment, the radiance of his straw hat encased in a wide, multi-colored ribbon, the mirrorlike polish of new ox-blood oxfords, the climactic elegance of his city cane. Ed Stovall paused, blinked, gulped at his Adam's apple and blushed. The fact that he had known Audrey Pearson throughout eight grades of school life did not in the least mitigate his present suffering.

At sixteen Audrey Pearson was a picture to make older men than Ed Stovall stop and even forget the Solomonlike glory of new clothes. A blond girl with deep, blue eyes and deep twin dimples in her healthy, pink cheeks, she was already enjoying the advantages of higher education in a finishing school at Portland, advantages that showed principally in the subtle simplicity of her dress and manner—the sort of advantages that teach a girl to play the devil with young fellows like Ed Stovall.

Ten days which he was graciously allowed to enjoy in the company of his old schoolmate—a schoolmate of whom he had not thought twice since he left Squamish did little to relieve Ed Stovall's suffering

The evening of the tenth day found the young folks of Squamish embarked on a launch ride to Hood's cove where a picnic supper was planned. It also found Ed Stovall so frenzied with the fever of first love that he was on the point of risking all

by confiding his state of mind to his adored one—just as if Audrey Pearson had not read him like a book a week ago!

After the clam-bake supper Ed scattered with the rest of the boys to bring in firewood for a huge evening blaze. Returning burdened, he passed a little thicket of blooming rhododendron. Screened from him by the thicket were two girls. One of them was Audrey Pearson—the name of the other does not matter. They were talking—talking about boys.

Ed's quick ear caught a question, put to the accompaniment of a giggle, "Honest Audrey, what d'you think of him of Ed Stovall, I mean?"

"Ed Stovall? I think he's too funny for anything, so *serious*—poor Skinny."

*Skinny!*

A moment Ed Stovall stood transfixed, going hot and cold. With a strange, new dignity he laid down his bundle of wood very quietly and walked back to the beach where several canoes lay stranded beside the launch. Without a word to anybody he shoved off one of these craft and paddled into the night.

Again and again he broke his slow-paddling return toward Squamish to rehearse the bitter scene in detail.

"Skinny!" The one word that made him fighting mad, she had called him that!

He had almost forgotten the hated name. It was more than a year since anybody had dared apply it to him. The last offender had been a fellow shipping clerk and the murderous quality of Ed's rage at the insult had won him the reputation of a fellow dangerous to rouse.

Now, it came from the lips of the girl he adored. The worst of it was the name fitted. Ed was still slim, despite every effort to overcome his natural handicap—slim, but tough as whipcord—but *she* would not acknowledge that. Oh, no! *Skinny*—

Suddenly he raised two clenched fists toward the dark bowl of heaven and uttered an inarticulate cry that was half groan, half sob.

"She called me *that*," he muttered through clenched teeth. "She did, eh? I'll show her, just for that. I'll show her—I'll *show* her, you wait and see!"

Ed Stovall left the canoe on the beach with a curt note of good-by to his friends. He caught the night boat to Seattle. Next morning he astonished Wynne by demanding a place on his clerical staff—any sort of place.

"I want to go to business college," he declared, the fires of a new determination glowing in his eyes. "I want to get some sense into my head."

"Well, glory be, at last!" gasped Wynne. "What d'you reckon on doing with yourself?"

"Don't know yet, but it's going to be something big—a big job, I tell you. Maybe I'll get to be boss of this whole outfit." To himself Ed added grimly, "I'll show her!"

In his forty-fifth year Frank Wynne demonstrated his natural genius for business organization beyond shadow of doubt.

The old Rainier Packing Company had got into a bad way, and the affairs of several other independent concerns were no better off. Wynne saw his chance—and struck. Following an off-year, when the anticipated big run of fish failed, he emerged from a chaos of reorganization and combination as president and general manager of the Puget Packers, the most formidable rival the old A. P. A. had ever encountered.

And rising with Wynne, emerged Ed Stovall, private secretary to the president and general manager, a young man of affairs who kept a staff of three stenographers and an office boy. That was the year that Ed Stovall returned again to Squamish to "show" Audrey Pearson.

Audrey had disappeared.

So engrossing had been the last year of business battle that Ed lost track of Squamish history. When he returned anticipating triumph it was to learn that old Captain Pearson had been dead the past ten months, Audrey had abandoned finishing-school and was supposed to be taking a business course or was, perhaps, already employed somewhere in Portland. At any rate, she had vanished beyond the ken of Squamish.

Ed Stovall cut short his vacation and

plunged into hard work to forget his disappointment. He explained to himself that it was bitter to be cheated of a well-earned revenge, but his uneasiness was deeper rooted than that. In idle hours, when he could no longer keep his thoughts from Audrey, he felt as if some very vital part of him had been lost beyond recovery.

A fine June morning in 1914, President Wynne of the Puget Packers was arranging his affairs with whirlwind speed, one eye on the clock and one on the outer door of his office through which he expected at any moment to see his newly-married bride enter. Wynne was on the eve of a tour of Europe, his first real vacation in years. Beside, that, he was married but a month and he was, without doubt, about the busiest man in all busy Seattle that morning.

The door opened, but to admit Ed Stovall and not the expected Mrs. Wynne. Ed Stovall looked excited, in spite of an evident attempt to remain calm. "I got her," he announced, importantly.

"Got her? I thought she was coming here. Jumping violets, that train leaves in "

"No, no, not Mrs. Wynne — she'll be along all right — but the new stenographer—"

"Oh, shucks! All right, glad to hear it hope she's got some sense in her head bet she hasn't?"

"Bet she has!" snapped Stovall

"Hey? What d'you know about— oh, I see, say, send her in!"

"Now, look here, Frank, I know this girl. She's all right from the ground up, see—no gum-chewing little simp like the last one—why we went to school together in Squamish—"

"All right kid, all right- all right, I don't care, don't send her in if you're afraid I'm going to fascinate her," Wynne grinned Then the grin disappeared as he caught sight of the clock. "Listen, Ed—got this all straight? You run my affairs, personal ones I mean, and routine company business. If it's anything big call up Caleb Walsh.

"Walsh will look after things for me. I'm going to try to get back for the director's meeting in September but, if I don't, Walsh holds my proxy and he'll run things. In effect, he's the boss until I get back because he holds the majority of stock. But you can't expect a big banker like Walsh to monkey with the little things—so it's up to you, kid. There's nothing to worry about. The run will probably be light this year. Prices already are agreed on and the pack practically all sold so take it easy and keep your hair on your head."

"You can trust me," Stovall promised. "I won't bother Walsh unless I have to— you know how well I like him—"

"That's all right," Wynne broke in anxiously, "don't get fresh with Walsh. You know I trust him—ah, there she is!"

The volcanic entrance of the new Mrs. Wynne broke up their conference. Wynne rushed his bride through the outer offices and to his waiting limousine, without a glance at the new stenographer who had already settled down at her corner by the window. In a chorus of good-byes from the office force the boss disappeared on his honeymoon.

Ed Stovall returned from the station whither he had accompanied the Wynnes and paused expectantly at Audrey Pearson's desk. The new stenographer looked up, quietly respectful. "Something, Mr. Stovall?"

"Why -er—yes. It's just about noon Aud—Miss Pearson. Won't you take lunch with me—there's such a lot I want to hear about you!"

Audrey shook her head slowly, a heightened color in her cheeks. "I can't," she explained kindly but very firmly. "It won't do at all. The other girls—don't you see, Mr. Stovall?"

"Mr. Stovall! Say, for Heaven's sake, Audrey, why *Mr.* Stovall? You didn't call me that in Squamish—"

"But this is different," protested Audrey. "This is business! Now please, Ed Mr. Stovall — you must understand me. We can't go back to the Squamish basis here. The other girls—don't you see? Look, they're already watching us. You know just as well as I do what they would be saying in a few days — favoritism — and that's the worst poison that can get into an office force—no decent girl can work with that whispered against her. If you want

me to stay here and I warn you I'm a mighty good stenographer and that I *need* this job we've got to remain just plain employee and boss—Miss Pearson and Mr Stovall. Can't you understand?"

"But at least after business hours—" Ed protested.

"No. Not even then. We stay strangers, or—surely you see how it would be! You wouldn't force me out of work just when I've found what I can do and like to do?"

Ed nodded. "You're right," he admitted. To that he added: "Lunch hour is from twelve to one, Miss Pearson, and when you come back please see me, I've got a lot of dictation."

Pondering over a lonely lunch, Ed Stovall had to admit that Audrey was right. He had learned a good deal about business beside what is taught in business colleges. He realized that if Audrey Pearson was to stay on the job if the rest of his office force was to be kept up to required efficiency, intimacy between himself and his new secretary, at least in business hours, must be shunned like poison. And after Ed still had hopes.

A grimly humorous idea occurred to him. By George, he had "showed" her after all! He had realized a boyish ambition He was her boss and that was the very thing he had looked forward to in his dreams. Now that he had grasped it, however, there was no trace of tinsel on the ginger bread. Well, life was a funny thing, wasn't it!

Ed kept on hoping –that was the only pleasure left to him.

Other men would have ceased to hope when after almost three months of torrid summer slipped by, Audrey Pearson remained the same calm, efficient, respectful, but oh! so very firm, young woman who had taken employment with the Puget Packers in June. Ed had pieced together her brief story: the loss of old Captain Pearson's little fortune in real estate speculation and her battle to educate herself for business without a friend or kin to help her. He had a tremendous respect for Audrey's pluck and he was obliged to admit that she was a very efficient young business woman. But he wished from the bottom of his heart that she had less of both these admirable qualities. He wanted an entirely different Audrey—Audrey the woman and he longed for her in his idle time with an intensity that put black rings under his eyes and threatened to ruin the usefulness of a very promising private secretary.

From Wynne there came a couple of brief letters and a scattering of picture postal-cards. Then, at the close of that July which saw the civilized world overturned, not a word. Wynne and his wife were somewhere in Europe when the Kaiser started his gray-clad army through Belgium. Beyond that nobody had an inkling of their whereabouts.

The London agency that had the forwarding of Wynne's mail was unable to give intelligent answer to Ed Stovall's telegrams of inquiry. The daily papers were filled with stories of frantic Americans paying fabulous sums to sleep in the steerage of homeward-bound liners; of Americans detained in the war zone. Ed Stovall could only hope that Wynne's shrewdness would extricate him from the chaos abroad and speedily bring him home. Not that the Puget Packers seemed to need his attention, but war time is a bad time for a man to be thousands of miles from his own interests

and Caleb Walsh had taken a sudden fancy for investigating the company's affairs. Ed distrusted Caleb Walsh—there were times when he hated the banker.

The story ran that Walsh had begun his career as cook in a lumber-camp, lending money at ten per cent a week. From that lowly position he had climbed to an interest in a loan office that fattened off the salaries of employees of railroads and other large corporations. Suddenly he burst upon the world a bank president, the past was buried, and he was a much respected citizen

Caleb Walsh was fat and of huge stature. He looked stupid, but his cold, little, gray eyes were keenly intelligent.

Because he had helped Wynne to finance the Puget Packers, not forgetting to take a generous profit from the transaction, Wynne gave him absolute trust in business matters.

A torrid morning toward the close of August found Walsh seated behind Frank Wynne's big desk, Ed and Audrey in attendance.

"Got those appraiser's reports on the fleet?" Walsh demanded. "Oh, h-m, yes. Let's see, where's that bid that came this morning, Miss Pearson, that letter from the what d'you call it corporation, eh?—yes, Pacific Holding Company, that's it. D'you see this letter, Stovall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Realize what it is?"

"It's an offer to buy those six old hulks of ours, for—"

"Exactly, an offer to buy our rotten old fleet for a third more than it cost us. Maybe you noticed there's a time clause in this offer, too? This Holding Company, whatever it may be, wants those ships by September 1, or the deal is off. A third more than they cost us, and we've used them six years. Stovall, I'm going to do a good stroke of business for Wynne—I'm going to sell those six ships."

"But won't Mr. Wynne be back in time—"

"Thunderation boy, I can't fool around waiting for Wynne! Where in Topheth is Wynne? Who knows? I don't? You, miss—miss—"

Audrey shook her head. "None of us know," Ed reported. "But he's sure to be back for the directors' meeting—"

"Maybe so, and when is that? September 10, that's when. Nothing doing with our deal then. No, sir, I sell, and I sell in time to get Wynne this fancy price. Now, miss—miss—you—take this letter, notice to the directors advancing the date of the annual meeting to August 29. Ready—"

"But, Mr. Walsh," Ed was perplexed at the financier's assumption of authority, "oughtn't we to try to get Mr. Wynne—"

The banker surveyed Ed with a patronizing grin. "Son," he suggested with heavy sarcasm, "you run along. You're getting thin worrying about other folks' business. Ha, ha, that's a good one, eh, Miss Whats-your-name? Go on, run along—Skinny!"

Ed Stovall was almost at the door when the hated name exploded on his ears with much the same effect as a bomb

He swung about with fists clenched, his face the same hue as his fiery hair. He advanced a step, his lips half open to answer the taunt

Audrey saw him and held her breath in fear. Walsh was too absorbed in enjoying his crude witticism to notice.

To Audrey's vast relief Ed won back his self-control and in no time the door had banged behind him

But, Ed Stovall was mad, mad to the soles of his feet, tingling, fighting mad.

He had not stood for that taunt from anybody—not even Frank Wynne himself. And, by George, he wouldn't stand for it now. He'd—what would he do?

That question was a poser. What *could* he do?

Quit? What's the use, that would only embarrass Wynne, the man to whom he owed everything.

Assault Caleb Walsh? Again that would react on Wynne.

Well, anyhow, by all that was holy, he'd write this fellow Walsh down in his black book a score to be settled some day. Walsh was a crook to begin with and some day something would happen—some shady deal when— Ah -ah, how about this anxiety to sell the company's ships?

Ed Stovall began to pace the little, cubby-hole office that was his own. With characteristic thoroughness he gave up his whole mind to Caleb Walsh and ships. On the face of it he could see nothing but advantage for Wynne in the unexpected offer the Puget Packers had received for their six old, wooden sailing vessels—relics of wind-jammer days, shorn of their top hamper and now doing duty as cannery tenders and storage vessels. The mysterious offer was more than generous—but why was Walsh so keen? Caleb Walsh was not the sort of fox to be keen for anybody's profit beside his own

Ed thought a half-hour, then he telephoned to the *Morning Post Intelligencer* and asked for Mr. Blue. Mr. Blue was in and he promised to be right down to see Ed. A quarter of an hour later he appeared, a shrewd, restless, humorous chap who had covered a water front beat for one particular morning newspaper so long

he was said to claim accquaintance with "Old Man Puget who dug the Sound."

Blue liked Ed and Ed liked Blue. Both were square dealers.

"The Pacific Holding Company?" mused Blue. "Never heard of it. Must be a new one. What's the matter?"

"Don't know. Listen, what do you know about the price of ships?"

"The price of ships? Oh, man!" Blue waved his arms wildly. "There simply ain't no price," he declared with ungrammatical emphasis. "You can't buy ships any more unless you catch a sucker—*say*, somebody trying to buy—oh, I see, so the Pacific Holding Company's after your fleet, eh? Some story!"

"Easy there," admonished Ed. "You know you'll get the story when it breaks, but right now there isn't any story, so just remember to keep it under your hat. What I want is to find out all about this company—who's in it—who's behind it—all the dope there is. Will you get it?"

"Come up and see me at the office at seven o'clock to-night," Blue answered.

"Thanks. So-long." Ed saw his friend out of the office. Returning he found Audrey settling herself at her typewriter. He felt instantly that he must confide his dim suspicions to some friendly ear.

"Look here, Miss Pearson," he began eagerly, "will you break the rule just once and take lunch with me. I've got to talk to somebody. There's something up around here that smells crooked, and I—"

Audrey plainly hesitated. "Oh, Ed," she began, "I—I don't know "

A heavy hand was laid on Ed's shoulder. Walsh, on his way to the street, had recalled his excellent joke and determined to play an encore.

"'Member what I told you, son," he admonished with an exasperating grin, "don't lose any weight, you know. Can't afford it, eh, Miss Whatsyourname—hey Skinny!"

A heavy finger prodded Ed's thin ribs and the great man walked away chuckling.

Did Audrey giggle! Ed could scarcely believe his ears. How was he to know that the sound was an involuntary little gasp of fright. Very erect and very red he swung haughtily on his heel and retired to his office, so flaming with resentment that he could neither work nor sit idle, but must pace and pace and grind his teeth at his helplessness to avenge an insult.

Promptly at seven o'clock Ed called on his friend Blue at the *Post-Intelligencer* office. The reporter was ready with his information

"The Pacific Holding Company," he explained, consulting a note on a scrap of copy paper, "was incorporated at Olympia last week. Capital stock half a million, fully subscribed; President, Mark Smith; Vice-President and Treasurer, Jacob Town; Secretary, Ralph Ford.

"Now, Town and Ford are nobodies. Town's a clerk in Smith's employ and Ford is office manager of the Potlatch Towing Company, which Smith is supposed to own."

"And Smith?"

"Don't you know—"

"Heard of him, that's all."

"Well, Mark Smith used to be in the loan shark graft years ago, associated with our eminent fellow townsman, Caleb Walsh—"

"Walsh!"

Blue answered Ed's involuntary exclamation with a shrewd glance. "I see you know something, or think you do," he murmured. "Well, Smith has dabbled in a number of things since then, but everybody knows he never made much. It's generally understood that he acts for Walsh when Walsh doesn't care to appear in person — understood, mind you, but not proved. So it would be safe to guess that the Pacific Holding Company is—"

"I see, Caleb Walsh."

"Yes. But don't say that for publication, it's only a guess mind you, and Walsh might not like it!"

"Look here, Blue. I know you can keep your mouth shut when I ask you to, and anyway this isn't news yet. Suppose our friend, Mr. Walsh, was to organize a little company in which he did not appear and then take advantage of a company in which he has been entrusted with complete control and sell that company's ships to himself at a little more than they originally cost. What would you call that?"

"If he could buy ships for a little more than they cost six or eight years ago," Blue replied instantly, "even if he paid twice or three times what they cost, I'd call it a darn shrewd piece of business. Ships! My Lord, Ed! ships are going to be worth anything you ask for them with this war on. You simply can't buy ships anymore! Shrewd business? Well, yes, I'd certainly call it that!"

"And I'd call it plain, downright highway robbery," declared Ed angrily.

"No you wouldn't, old man, not for publication. Not unless you could prove it. And then you wouldn't, anyway. Believe me, I know the libel law. I know! So be darn careful—"

"Oh, I'll be careful all right, but I'll bet anything you want to name I'll knock that little scheme in the head," Ed vowed.

"Good enough," Blue agreed, "and Ed, I'll dig around. If I can find out anything I'll let you know. I owe you something anyway for the scoops you've shoved my way."

"I wish to heaven you could find Frank Wynne," Ed sighed

"I wish I could, but -well, I'll do my best'"

"And I'll do mine." As he walked down the street Ed muttered angrily to himself, "Skinny—he *will* call me Skinny! We'll see about that."

Next morning in some subtle way, without a word being spoken or hinted, Ed became aware that Audrey Pearson had *not* giggled at his nickname—or if she had giggled, that she was a very contrite young woman. By the time he had finished the routine dictation he knew Audrey must be taken into his confidence. Making sure that they were not overheard as they sat in Wynne's big private office, he moved his chair beside hers and outlined the discoveries he had made about Walsh.

"Listen, Audrey," he declared earnestly, "we've got to find Wynne and get him back here before that directors' meeting. I haven't any authority to postpone the meeting, but Wynne must be here to protect himself. There isn't a man in the corporation I can go to with this, except Wynne.

"Hunt, Dillon, and Gilbert are Walsh men, indebted to Walsh in various ways. They'll do as Walsh says unless Wynne is here to boss them. Old Captain Delaney and Pete Olsen are all right, but they only control a small block of stock and they aren't sharp enough or spry enough to be of any use. And Wynne—why Audrey, Frank Wynne has been father and mother to me. He's made me everything worth while that I am or can be. I'll go to jail for Wynne any day, and believe me, I'll fight for him alone if I have to!"

"I know," Audrey nodded seriously. "I don't know Wynne, but I know a lot about him, and I'm for him, too. And we'll do our best. But Ed, what *can* we do?"

"Find Wynne—that's the only thing. If we can't I—by George, I'll tackle Walsh single-handed, at the director's meeting—If I lose my job for it."

"Don't—I mean, be careful—Ed—"

"Audrey!"

Instantly she was firm. "No," she declared, "remember we are employer and employee—and I am going to keep this place—Mr. Stovall."

"All right," groaned Ed, "if the job's worth more to you, then—than -"

Audrey rose, pale but calm. "It is," she answered briefly, and left him miserable

"If Frank Wynne is in the United States or anywhere on the continent," Ed explained later to Audrey, "it's just like him not to say so. When he takes a notion to come home, he'll come and the first we'll know about it is when he says, 'Hello!' But we'll do our best to wake him up"

They got out the railroad map of the country and salted it liberally with telegrams to Wynne, planting them along the division points of the various transcontinental routes. They left messages at a half-dozen New York hotels which Wynne might patronize and they sent more cablegrams to the continent, though there was little hope of reaching Wynne in time if he was still across the Atlantic.

But Ed did hope for a message authorizing him to postpone the deal in ships by which Caleb Walsh planned to take advantage of his trust.

It was all very well for secretary and

stenographer to put their heads together and plan and to declare that they would find Wynne in time. But they could not find him. It was all very well for Ed to assert that he would go before the directors and make a personal fight to save Wynne's ships. Nevertheless he knew in his heart that the fight would be useless, nothing more than an involuntary protest against seeing his friend robbed, for he had no proof of what he knew to be true.

The day of the director's meeting saw Ed at the offices of the Puget Packers before any of the office force. He still hoped to find a telegram from Wynne.

He paced his little office desperately, half sick with excitement and the worry of suspense. He had no course left but to make personal charges against Walsh and take the inevitable consequence of dismissal from the corporation.

Then at ten o'clock Blue telephoned. He wanted Ed to see a man who was supposed to know something about Mark Smith. Ed dashed out of the office with a hasty word to Audrey.

It was one o'clock when he returned, no wiser than he had gone forth. Audrey was not at her desk but evidently had gone to lunch. At half past one she had not returned. At a quarter to two Ed asked about her.

"She left the office not ten minutes after you did this morning," one of the stenographers reported. "She didn't say a word to anybody—I dunno *what* was eating her, I'm sure! Maybe she—"

"All right," Ed dismissed the girl

Audrey gone! Had she deserted? Was the suspense too much for her—or did she think it wiser not to be connected in any way with Ed's rash plans?

But he felt her absence. With her went most of his fine resolutions to fight for Wynne. He began to see himself as a fool boy, meddling with other people's business, rushing into an affair where he was not wanted. Why, all he had to do was keep still, do nothing—nobody, certainly not Wynne, would ever blame him for that!

He heard Walsh's voice in the corridor. The directors were arriving. The sound of the banker's heavy laugh jarred him from his cowardly thoughts. "He called me Skinny, did he?" he gritted through clenched teeth. "All right. I'll bet I put a bomb under him that gives him a headache if I lose my own head doing it!" He gathered up the memoranda of business before the meeting and sought his place at the director's table

Used to sitting beside Wynne, taking a quiet part in the business of these annual meetings, Ed had never regarded the directors of the Puget Packers as a very formidable body of men. Mostly they seemed good-natured, a bit stupid about catching the point of questions, inclined to dawdle through business. To-day he found himself studying them as a prisoner might study the faces of a jury that has just brought in its sealed verdict.

There were Hunt, Dillon, and Gilbert, agreeing readily with all that Walsh said and voting "yes" automatically as the routine business moved on. Old Captain Delaney was slightly deaf, a hard old man and a stickler for etiquette.

Ed shuddered as he thought of the effect his rashness would have on this rigid old skipper. And Olsen—slow witted, easy going, who cared little except to hear of the annual dividend—all he knew of business was the operation of a salmon trap

An hour of slow torture passed. Ed prayed for news of Wynne as a condemned man might pray for pardon. Why couldn't he return—even at the last minute—

Then the last minute passed. The question of selling the fleet was before the meeting.

Walsh read the bid of the Pacific Holding Company and the valuation report on the six wooden vessels.

"I can't see much to be discussed about this," he remarked. "We bought these ships dear, six years ago, we've used 'em hard and here's a company foolish enough to offer us a third more than they cost and back up their bid with a certified check. All we got to do is act quick. Hey? Ain't that right, gentlemen?"

Hunt, Dillon, and Gilbert nodded and grunted assent. "Looks all right to me," quavered Captain Delaney. Olsen merely stared.

Ed Stovall was on his feet, striving to keep a quaver out of his voice.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you must listen to me a minute. Mr. Wynne not being here—"

"Hey, what's this?" growled Walsh. "Who asked you to butt in?"

"That's all right," blustered the thin secretary, "I'm close to Frank Wynne, and I speak for him "

A murmur ran round the table.

"Well, you got the nerve of the devil," roared the banker, slapping his open palm against the mahogany. "You sit down—"

"I won't sit down, not till I warn you all this sale is just plain, highway robbery. Those ships are worth six times what's bid for them—I got figures to show you—"

"My God, the boy's crazy!" Walsh gasped. "Somebody send for a cop—"

"What's the matter—what's that young whippersnapper want?" rasped Captain Delaney, hand cupped to his ear. "What's he say, more salary? Tell him—"

"I say this sale of ships is a plot!" roared Ed. "A plot, do you hear me, to rob Frank Wynne. He owns most of the stock here and he stands to lose most. This Pacific Holding Company—what is it? Investigate it, gentlemen, that's all! Look who's behind it. I'll tell you who's behind it, it's Caleb—"

Walsh was on his feet, flaming red of face, his eyes glittering dangerously.

"Order!" he roared. "Come to order. Now, you *-you*—get out of here you cub, before we throw you out, you hear me. Send for a cop, somebody—"

The meeting became a chorus of contempt and denunciation and Ed Stovall was the target for it all.

Walsh made his voice heard above the din. "Listen!" he shouted. "You—you march, pronto, kid! You're fired, you fool, fired, if you can understand that. Either you walk out peacably or, by heaven, we'll put you in a strait-jacket. Will you go?"

Ed opened his mouth to try again—read the verdict in the red faces that glared at him, and tasted defeat. He turned slowly from the table and moved across the room, crushed and numbed by his misery.

As he neared the door he heard Walsh's voice, "Well, gentlemen, now, we've cured that young pup of his fit, we'll get back to this ship business—"

A sudden, deadly silence succeeded the broken sentence. Ed Stovall, fumbling blindly for the door knob was insensible to its import. Finally the knob turned in his clumsy grasp and he swung back the door.

A voice from the director's room was calling him, but he did not heed, then another voice, a voice and a name that pierced the numbness of his brain like a searchlight, "Skinny—*Skinny*—oh, Skinny, come back. I found him. He's here!"

At that name Ed wheeled and saw, as in a dream, Frank Wynne and beside him Audrey, walking down the long room from the door that led to Wynne's private office.

"Ed, come here!" Wynne commanded.

An hour later as a group of sadder and wiser directors adjourned gladly from the table where they had been listening to unpleasant truths, Wynne seized Ed by the arm. "Go into my private office and talk to that new stenog of yours, kid," he whispered. "And listen, don't get fresh with her, see? She's my friend! She got word of our stalled train and she had the sense and the nerve to charter a car and hang the expense so she could get me here in time. So you be darn good to her."

But Ed was on his way.

Audrey raised wide, frightened eyes as Ed called her name. Oh, Ed," she gasped, "I'm so sorry, can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you? For finding Wynne—"

"No, no, not that—though I ought to have left word for you, but every minute counted, but not that, Ed—"

"Well, then what—"

"For c-calling you that—that name. I —I know how you h-hate it, but I couldn't make you hear me—I—"

Ed Stovall swept his very efficient stenographer into an embrace that mingled her yellow hair with his flaming shock of red.

"Audrey!" he rasped. "Sweetheart, as if I had anything to forgive! Why that's the bulliest name I ever heard—call me that again—call me that always. When you say it I love that name. Call me Skinny!"

# THE FINGER OF DEATH.

## BY JOHN BOYD CLARKE.

**Author of "The Locked Door," "Broadname Whispers," etc.**

### A FIVE-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

STOVER CONNORTON, dependent upon his Aunt Regina for a livelihood, met Millicent Driggs through saving her life when the explosion of a truck-load of shells on an open draw-bridge destroyed the jitney in which they had been riding. Leaving the scene of the accident in a hired car, they were followed and questioned by Gordon Brayne, multimillionaire. Connorton later dismissing their driver at the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street Ferry when he overheard Brayne instruct the latter to bring him the girl's address.

Connorton became friendly with Millicent, concerning whose family there seemed to be a mystery, centering in her father, Enderly Driggs, a queer character whose insinuations against Brayne, on the occasion of Connorton's first visit to their flat, both wife and daughter seemed anxious to silence, Driggs boasting of his hold over Brayne as the possessor of an important and dangerous secret.

Then, quite suddenly, one day the girl divulged the truth: Driggs was a pensioner on the millionaire's bounty, calling regularly each week at the latter's office in the Murrivale Building for his stipend.

Finally, one evening, Stover having been invited to supper, Driggs failed to return from his usual visit to the office. He had gone there that day, and ascended to the private room by a special elevator, the existence of which was not generally known. There, after a sarcastic fling by Mole, Brayne's private secretary, Driggs had launched into a tirade against both Mole and Brayne, hinting darkly of a secret, of a happening ten years previous, of the fate of "poor Sadie Phelps." As he retreated to the elevator Brayne visibly stiffened. "I want Quentin," he cried. Then, as the elevator door slid shut, the fingers of the secretary hovered over a row of buttons on Brayne's desk, one of which was red. Later Hammond, a porter, discovered Driggs's dead body in the elevator at the bottom of the shaft. Physicians gave the cause of death as heart trouble, but Connorton, after seeing a mysterious intruder enter and examine the hands of the corpse where it lay in the flat, found and photographed a curious marking on one of them, almost like a burn, the fingers of the other being oddly swollen and slightly discolored. Then, after a talk with Billy Clare, the policeman on beat, he interviewed Hammond, who told him of the tradition of the "accident" in the elevator which had occurred to a girl employed at Brayne's. This was Driggs's secret, reflected Connorton. It was a startling thought.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ENTERING THE MAZE.

"HOLD on," said Good Sense, coming to his rescue. "That another person was killed in that elevator in which Mr. Driggs was found dead is merely a coincidence."

"But," Suspicion held sway, "that the former death should have occurred about the time that Millicent's father became incompetent, and that the person killed in that elevator was likewise an employee of Gordon Brayne, is a coincidence to arouse inquiry."

Oh! he was stung by something more than curiosity. The fangs of the mystery were set deep in his mind. Whether or no Enderly Driggs had suffered foul play, there was something queer about his death.

He was as sure of that now, was Stover Connorton, as of anything in the world. His interest in Millicent alone would have driven him on in this inquiry, had he not felt his mind stirred to its depths by the several incidents connected with the tragedy.

Enderly Driggs's boastings of his knowledge of the multimillionaire's secrets could not have been alone the vaporings of a weak and shallow mind. Gordon Brayne had not

pensioned his old employee merely out of good nature. Had Driggs suddenly become dangerous—a threatening object in the multimillionaire's path?

"Pshaw!" Good Sense said again. "The old man dropped dead of heart failure."

"And that mark upon his palm?" interjected Suspicion.

"Did you ever hear who the girl was who died in that elevator? Her name, I mean?" the student asked the porter, arousing himself from these shuttling meditations.

"Ah, no, sir. I never heard much about it, it's the truth. Just a hint now and then. 'Twasn't spoke of much—nor *this* won't be," John Hammond returned, shaking his head.

"You mean it was hushed up at the time?"

"'Tis likely. You know how it is. Mr. Brayne's a big man. If he passes the word to forget anything that's happened—about the death of this poor old fellow I found, for instance—why, I reckon most anybody around this building that wants to keep his job will come pretty near forgetting. What do you think?"

"It would seem the part of wisdom to do so," Connorton admitted. "I take it that word has not been passed in this case."

"Not yet, sir. Leastways," said John Hammond, grinning, "it hasn't reached me."

"Of course, I'm merely curious about that ancient happening you speak of—the death of the girl. But regarding Mr. Driggs's death I feel differently. Can I see that private elevator, Mr. Hammond?"

"I can tell you how to find it," whispered the porter. "Don't you ask questions about it of anybody else. You walk right into that lower office—it's one of Mr. Brayne's suite, sir, though 'tis down here on the first floor and all the rest of his rooms are on the sixth and seventh."

"I see. I will be circumspect," Connorton said, slipping the old fellow his *pourboire*. "By the way, in all probability Mr. Brayne was not informed of the death of old Driggs until he came down-town Saturday?"

"That's right, sir. Mr. Brayne does not come in much before ten, and Mr. Mole not long before him. I often see one, or both of them, enter and go up by that private elevator."

"On Saturday morning," Connorton asked thoughtfully, "were they here at their usual time? And did they go up by the private elevator?"

"I guess they got here at the usual time," John Hammond said. "But they went up front."

"How do you know?" Connorton asked, quickly

"I was waiting in that lower office to tell 'em about the dead man. They didn't come. At half-past ten I was sent for to go to the super's office and Mr. Mole was there talking about it. I gathered he and Mr. Brayne had just been told."

"They learned of the tragedy about ten?"

"I suppose so. Not earlier," and John Hammond stared at Connorton curiously.

The latter was not without method in his questioning. He had suddenly remembered that the huge cross of roses bearing the card of the multimillionaire had arrived at the Driggs apartment before eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, but shortly after the body of the old clerk was brought up-town.

It takes more than a few minutes to build a flower piece of that kind.

Connorton thanked John Hammond again and went his way. He merely looked in at that lower anteroom out of which the shaft of the private elevator rose. There was nobody there. He left the building by the side exit.

It was indisputable that Enderly Driggs on Friday afternoon had visited the millionaire's private office as usual and had left the same before either his benefactor or the secretary, Mr. Mole, departed for the day.

Mole—Connorton had heard old Driggs speak of the man—Frederick Mole—and in bitterness. So he had spoken of Gordon Brayne.

Driggs was found dead in the elevator by which Brayne usually left the building at the end of the day's business. Nor did the millionaire or his secretary use the private elevator in entering the building on Saturday morning.

Suspicion had the upper hand again: Good Sense took a back seat in this colloquy that was going on in Stover Connorton's mind.

But he was at a loss how to go about further investigation of the mystery. If it *was* a mystery at all!

"I may be uncovering some mare's nest that does not concern me. The death of that girl John Hammond spoke of may have nothing at all to do with Enderly Driggs going off his chump. I'd like to know more about her, just the same."

It was nevertheless nothing to do with the girl so long dead that next held Stover Connorton's attention. Riding up-town, he suddenly thought of the cross of roses Gordon Brayne had sent.

He left the train short of Harlem, remembering the address of the florist who had furnished the funeral piece. He found the shop, and the man who owned it was present. A word reminded him of the cross, for it was not often he had such a lavish order for rosebuds.

"Me and my whole family worked on it, mister," he told Connorton, rubbing his hands in satisfaction.

"Was the order telephoned in by Mr. Brayne? You filled it with remarkable celerity."

"Oh, no, sir; it wasn't a phone order. The gentleman came himself. He gave me his card to send with the cross."

"True," murmured the thoughtful Connorton. "At what time was he here?"

"About eight o'clock Saturday morning. Oh, yes; we worked hard on it—a quick job, as you say, sir. Hope you will remember us at some similar time."

The student went away with another hard nut to crack: "Brayne was not supposed to know of Mr. Driggs's death till about ten o'clock, after he reached his offices. And he ordered the flower piece two hours before! There's something queer there—something queer."

Reason still scoffed at the possibility of a man in Gordon Brayne's position conniving at foul play. The impression the personality of the multimillionaire had made upon Connorton caused his mind to revolt at such an idea. It would be beneath Brayne to consider that poor old weakling, Driggs, of sufficient importance to have him removed. Driggs had died of natural causes. The doctors said so.

But doctors had been known to make mistakes. That strange mark—no mere bruise—on the dead man's palm could not be ignored.

The multimillionaire and his private secretary had kept away from the small elevator both on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. Was that because of guilty knowledge of the old man's death? By the testimony of the florist Gordon Brayne must have known his old clerk was dead as early as eight o'clock on Saturday.

"Murder or not—and it isn't impossible that Driggs was murdered by *somebody*," muttered Connorton at last, "I'm going to get at the bottom of this before I get through.

"If Brayne or his secretary knew before morning of the death of Driggs, why should they appear to be ignorant when they arrived at the offices Saturday? And if Brayne did not know, how about his ordering those flowers so early?

"Oh, hang!" ejaculated the student in vexation. "I can mill these ideas over and over in my mind till it's as addled as a stale egg. I'll get nowhere by just 'supposing'!

"I must decide upon some sane course to pursue—some certain thread to follow. That is the only sensible way if I am to get anywhere at all in this beclouded affair.

"The mark on Mr. Driggs's hand is the starting point of all the mystery. I must have somebody's opinion on *that*," he told himself. "Professor Cramer might be able to help. Of course, if a post-mortem is actually necessary before the nature of that scar can be learned, Millicent will have to know—and the police.

"Great Scott! Nothing like that, I hope. Millicent would not thank me for stirring up any scandal. And yet, if her father was deliberately murdered because he was in the way—

"Little men have been removed from the path of big men ere this. It is true Gordon Brayne does not seem like a man who would stoop to such a criminal act

"Yet, I do not know what might have been at stake. The secret knowledge of which Enderly Driggs was possessed might have threatened if divulged to shake the very foundation of Brayne's fortune."

He left the car near Millicent's home and called there before going to his own lodgings. Millicent was not in.

"I believe she has gone to put an advertisement in the paper for a position," Mrs. Driggs said. "She feels that she must be regularly employed, now that father has left us, Mr. Connorton. She says we must move into a less expensive place and she will find some bright little girl to be with me days."

The young man asked a question that he feared was impudent: "Isn't Mr Driggs's pension to be continued by his former employer?"

"That we do not know," the invalid replied. "We have heard nothing from Mr. Brayne. I tell Milly she should go to see him or at least write to him. But she has a feeling—"

"I understand," Connorton said, nodding. "She feels some delicacy in approaching Mr. Brayne in the matter. But if he was willing to care for your husband he should be equally willing to help you and Millicent now."

"Milly says she cannot wait to see what he will do," sighed Mrs. Driggs. "She is *so* independent. And it is true we need money—all we can get. We always *do* need money, it seems to me."

He did not wait for the girl's return. As Connorton came out of the house he noted a man lingering across the street from the Driggs apartment. He thought the lounger had been looking up there at the windows; but he was not sure. Nor did the student see the other's countenance. He had a feeling that the man had been standing there when he entered the house.

It was later, when he had arrived at his own lodgings and gone in that, in glancing idly from the window into the quiet street, he spied the same figure holding up a lamp-post diagonally across from the house.

The fellow's back was again turned to him. Apparently he was doing anything but watching Connorton's windows. And yet—there he was!

"Great Scott!" muttered the student. "Am I being shadowed or is it a joke? And if I am being watched, by whom, and for what reason?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TEN YEARS PAST.

HE remained indoors that evening. Occasionally he tried to spy upon the shadowy figure which so puzzled him. It disappeared after a while; at least, he could not discover it in the gas-lighted street.

Perhaps the man had been relieved by another operative. Or Connorton's rooms might be watched from some house across the street.

But why?

Had his inquiries at the Mirrivale Building been reported to somebody who thought it necessary to "keep tabs" upon him? A private detective agency might easily keep an operative on his trail whenever he left the house.

"And I hope it will do them a world of good," Connorton said, with disgust.

The idea determined him to take up the puzzling matter of Enderly Driggs's death with more seriousness. If he was being watched because of his inquiries, then there must be something criminal—some foul play in connection with the mystery.

It behooved him, so Connorton ruminated, to scheme out a plan of procedure that would enable him to arrive soon at some conclusion in his investigations. Haphazard inquiry would not do.

To interview the two medical men who had viewed Driggs's body and pronounced him dead of heart failure—and nothing more—was not immediately necessary.

He shrank, indeed, from being questioned by the police as to his reasons for entering upon the inquiry. But he *could* talk with Professor Cramer and endeavor to gain from him some idea of the cause of the strange mark upon the hand of the dead man.

He went further, too, in plotting out this investigation he had begun. He jotted

down in his notebook several lines in inquiry, one of which was: "Look up former tragedy in elevator. Who was the girl?"

This was not the first item in his notebook; but it was the first he took up the following day. Knowing that Professor Cramer was not to be seen before afternoon at his laboratory, he decided to go downtown first

When he left his lodgings Connorton gave the neighborhood a swift scrutiny. If there really was anybody shadowing him he did not discover the person at this time

However, he gave little consideration to the possibility of his being trailed wherever he went. He was going now where anybody might go—to the publication office of one of the daily papers. He had some slight acquaintance with a man working on the paper—an alumnus of his college—and obtained permission through the good offices of this man to examine the "morgue envelopes" devoted to the life and experiences (as far as newspaper accounts went) of Gordon Brayne.

Connorton might have gone to one of the libraries and looked up the files of any city paper of the necessary age—ten or eleven years back—for an account of the death of the girl employed by the Brayne Operating Company who had been stricken in the private elevator. It seemed to the student, however, that to get at Gordon Brayne's biographical envelopes might be the better and the quicker way to arrive at what he sought.

A man as prominent as the multimillionaire was sure to be closely watched by the newspapers. Indeed, when Connorton was referred to the biographical department the "morgue keeper" produced half a dozen big envelopes devoted to Gordon Brayne and his affairs.

There had been some attempt made to catalog these hundreds of clippings under different headings; but the cataloging had been clumsily done. Connorton had to search pretty thoroughly through the mass of printed matter before he found any hint of what he sought.

That hint he found in a paragraph tucked away in an account of Gordon Brayne's marriage to Miss Lucille Hetherington, daughter of Colonel Miles Hetherington, who at the time of the marriage (more than ten years before) was quite a prominent figure in city politics. The Hetheringtons were among the very best New York people. The paragraph in question read:

> The story in an afternoon paper stating that the young woman, Sadie Phelps, who died of apoplexy in one of the elevators of the Mirrivale Building, was Mr. Brayne's personal secretary, and had gone immediately from an interview with the new head of the Brayne Operating Company to the elevator wherein the tragedy occurred, was vigorously denied at the offices of the company by Mr. Frederick Mole, who, while the happy pair are honeymooning, represents Mr Gordon Brayne

This item yielded few facts regarding that ancient happening that had so piqued Stover Connorton's interest, save the name of the girl. In addition he noted that, as old John Hammond had heard, the girl who dropped dead in the private elevator was reported in the newspaper as having met her death in one of the public cars in the Mirrivale Building.

Denial was made, too, of any close connection—business or otherwise—between Sadie Phelps and the head of the great corporation. Yet, Connorton asked himself, if the girl had not known the multimillionaire very well, how had she known about that private elevator shaft to the sixth floor of the Mirrivale Building?

He searched further among the clippings gathered for so many years by the morgue keeper of this newspaper regarding the man who, at the sudden death of old Peter Gordon Brayne, was elevated automatically to the head of a dozen corporations and to the administration of a hundred million dollars.

At the time of his accession to this eminence Gordon Brayne had been one of the youngest multimillionaires in New York business life. For a year previous he had been very close to his uncle, P. G. Brayne, although before that time serving only as a junior clerk in the operating company that controlled the Brayne millions.

His rise, according to the published accounts at the time of Gordon Brayne's mar-

riage, had been meteoric and most romantic.

Old Peter Gordon Brayne, as everybody knew, had the temper of a hyena with the rabies! He had quarreled with every relative he had in the world, save this namesake of his, who was too insignificant in position, it seemed, to be worth quarreling with.

When the present head of the Brayne Operating Company had come to his uncle and asked for a job, the job had been thrown to him as a bone is thrown to a stray dog. The newspaper accounts of old P. G.'s character were not flattering.

Then suddenly, after several years, the old man had removed Gordon Brayne from the inconsequential position he held and made him his right-hand man. All the powers of president of the several corporations in which the Brayne fortune was invested were placed upon Gordon Brayne before his uncle died.

So well had old "P. G." arranged affairs that there was no hitch in the running of the business. It was even whispered that the old man had chosen Miss Lucille Hetherington to be his nephew's wife and had directed that the young people be married at once without regard to his demise.

These facts, more or less interesting because of the concern he felt in the multimillionaire the very first time he had seen him, the student gathered from the clippings upon the topic of the marriage of Gordon Brayne and Lucille Hetherington. But it was in another envelope he found the following article which he copied into his note-book verbatim:

DROPPED DEAD IN AN ELEVATOR

Yesterday afternoon, shortly before four, when the offices of the Brayne Operating Company in the Mirrivale Building were emptied of clerks, Miss Sadie Phelps, a stenographer formerly employed in a personal capacity by Mr Gordon Brayne, the fortunate young man who so recently acquired a hundred or more millions of dollars and a beautiful wife in the person of Miss Lucille Hetherington, dropped dead of apoplexy in one of the elevators while descending to the street. The body was removed to the apartment of Mrs. Adelaide Ralph, at — West Twenty-First Street, where the unfortunate young woman had boarded for several years. It is understood Miss Phelps had no family, Mrs. Ralph giving her name as that of the young woman's nearest friend.

There were no further references to the death of Sadie Phelps in any of the clippings. Aside from the denial that the young woman was closely associated with Gordon Brayne, there really was nothing of moment in what Connorton read. "The vigorous denial" of Frederick Mole seemed a suspicious circumstances—and that was all.

Connorton desired to know more about Sadie Phelps. He could not go very well to the offices of the Brayne Operating Company and make inquiries, and the newspaper clippings afforded him nothing more searching than the above.

A decade had passed since the tragedy. Was the girl's "nearest friend" to be found at the same place on West Twenty-First Street? Connorton took the Sixth Avenue Elevated up-town to learn if by any possibility Mrs. Adelaide Ralph was known at the number given in the newspaper report of the girl's death.

That number and those adjoining now were occupied by a ten-story loft building, swarming with "gents' pants-makers."

"A fine chance to trace Mrs. A. Ralph," the young man told himself in disgust. "That thread is tied in a hard knot. Nothing doing."

But this was only one item on his list. He continued on up-town to the college and to Professor Cramer's studio and laboratory.

This was the time of year when the professor was free of the scholastic yoke. Connorton had been a favorite pupil; but he knew well there was only one thing that would excuse his visit in the professor's eyes. Unless the visitor could bring something curious—something of actual interest to the savant he would not be welcome.

Connorton had the photograph he had made of the dead man's palm in his hand when the peering, scowling professor unbarred his door.

"Don't bring me any of your bugs today, Stover," he snarled. "I'm busy."

"Does this look like a bug?" the student

asked, smiling. "This is no new specimen for your insectarium. Give a look."

"Humph! Been to the morgue? Nasty habit," croaked the professor.

"The man was dead, all right. But he was not in the morgue. What do you think of that mark?"

"What do you think of the canals of Mars?" demanded Professor Cramer in return. "That is not a disease, is it? What did the man die of?"

"Heart."

"Really?"

"The medical men say so. But what made that mark? It was not there, I am positive, a few hours before death, and the undertaker assures me he did not cause it."

"Come in," snapped Professor Cramer. "Bolt the door. You are not the only nuisance who has been here to-day."

The long room with its glass roof and shadow sheets for the graduation of light—like a photographer's studio—was littered only as such a laboratory can be littered. The professor was a dark, tall, mystic-looking man with black brows, mustache, and inperial. His keen eyes behind thick, toric lenses fastened upon the photograph of the scarred palm with an avidity which increased in ratio to the concentration of his mind upon the subject before him.

He sat down in the ruin of a canvas reclining chair and held the photograph at a proper angle for scrutiny.

"You bring me this as many people quote Scripture. They give you text without context," growled Professor Cramer. "You give me no information regarding the man, or his habits or circumstances, or the events surrounding his death."

"He dropped dead—supposedly. He had a bad heart, according to medical opinion It was not an unexpected blow to his family. But it seemed to me," Connorton said, earnestly, "that such a mark as that should be explained. The doctors gave it no attention."

"Of course not," sneered the savant. "The medical profession is the profession of the perfectly obvious. 'Died of loss of breath'—a universal post-mortem declaration. But whether this mark had anything to do with the man's death Is he buried?"

"Yes," Connorton told him.

"I tell you, I want the context," growled Professor Cramer. "You are a noticing young fellow, Stover. Why don't you tell me something more? If you were moved to photograph that hand—h-m! What else did you see?"

Connorton related in full the incidents of that gruesome hour when he had been awakened from his sleep to see the mysterious intruder disturbing the hands of the dead man in the coffin. It was Connorton's observations regarding the scarred left palm and the fingers of the right hand that interested Professor Cramer most profoundly.

"Leave me this," he said, tossing the unmounted photograph upon a littered retort table. "I'll look into it. But don't bother me for a week. I am as busy as a flea on a hot rock, Stover."

Connorton saw plainly he had worn out his welcome. But he knew likewise by the gleam in Professor Cramer's eye that he had succeeded in arousing that gentleman's curiosity.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SECRETARY.

WHILE he was walking across town to Millicent's house Connorton spied again the person he thought had trailed him home the night before. He had all but forgotten that he was the object of a detective's vigilance

He did not see the man's face; but he positively identified on second glance the hat and suit he wore.

"Item: If you are shadowing a party, to be successful, possess an extensive wardrobe," the student mentally noted. "I'd never noticed that chap just now if it wasn't for the green band on his hat. Those are well set-up shoulders. He looks like—who *does* he look like? Somebody I've seen or know."

However, the identity of this individual who seemed to be so anxious to keep him in view troubled Connorton but little. He was going straight to Millicent's door, and the fellow had already trailed Connorton to that spot. He left the operative on the

nearest corner when he approached the apartment house, and gave him no further thought at the time.

Millicent was unfeignedly glad to see him and it warmed Connorton to the core to see the light in her eyes when she gave him her hand. But he was too wise to try to change his brotherly attitude.

"What have you been doing?" he asked her as they sat down in the little parlor which would ever be secretly a gruesome place to him.

"Like that famous character in Holy Writ: 'Walking up and down the earth,'" she confessed. "And, oh, Mr. Connorton! I *am* tired. I cannot wait for my own advertisement to bring answers?"

"Are you truly seeking a position?" he asked her gravely.

"I must."

"But Mr. Brayne—"

"There is nothing at all sure about that," she said, a tiny frown marring her brow.

"No?"

"We have heard nothing from him," she said, briefly.

"But on Friday?"

"I have a feeling, Mr. Connorton," she said, with a desperate look in her face, "that we shall hear nothing at all from father's old employer. Mr. Gordon Brayne is nothing to us, nor we to him. Whatever it was that made him kind to father—well! that is all past."

"You really think that Mr. Brayne paid your father a pension because he feared him?" the student asked gravely.

"For some such reason," she sighed.

"It is too bad, then," Connorton rejoined, "that the reason for his paying the pension does not still exist."

"Oh, Mr. Connorton!" she exclaimed. "Don't say such a thing. I have thought of it so much since I grew old enough to understand. I would far rather we were independent of him. I am not afraid of work."

"But he'd never miss that little weekly sum," grumbled Connorton

"Hush!" she implored "*Suppose it were blood money?*"

Connorton thought of the girl, Sadie Phelps, who had died ten years before in the private elevator. Of apoplexy? Just as Enderly Driggs had died there of heart failure?

He wondered again if, by any chance, there was the same scar on Sadie Phelps's hand that there was on the palm of Millicent's father.

"I fancy you have thought of that possibility too much," the student told Millicent, with calmness he secretly did not feel. "You have become supersensitive upon the subject."

"Oh! I hope we have got through with Gordon Brayne for all time!" she cried.

Connorton made up his mind then and there that it would not do to take Millicent into his confidence in any particular regarding this private inquiry he was making.

From years of brooding upon her father's connection with Gordon Brayne she had grown nervously apprehensive of the situation. Her father's death, indeed, was a relief to the harassed girl. She looked forward to hard work—a life of toil—with less distrust.

She gave him some particulars of her search for a position, and gave them cheerfully. Yet he could see that her very soul had been seared by some of her experiences.

A girl without influence and possessing the personal attractions that were Millicent's could not search haphazard among city advertisers without meeting men with the habits of the hog and the ravening appetite of the hyena.

Connorton ground his teeth at the pictures her simply related facts brought to his mental vision. He wished he might implore her not to look further—to make no attempt to obtain a position that would serve to support her mother and herself.

Ah! how it rasped him that he was not independent! When he came away and plodded homeward his cheeks fairly burned.

"I'm not half a man," was the way he bitterly scourged himself. "I cannot even tell the girl how much I think of her. I'd marry her to-morrow and take care of her and her mother, if I could; and I don't even dare ask if she would let me!

"I can't live this way much longer—a mere dangler on Aunt Regina's apron-

strings. Why, if the old lady took it into her head to do so, she might cast me adrift at any time. I'm a vagabond; a tramp is better off than I because he has learned how to subsist without work, and I have not'

"I would not know how to support Millicent and her mother if the girl would marry me. Great Scott! What an inconsequential and useless person she must secretly think me. And I am—I am! There's no use blaming it all on Aunt Regina

"I should have felt the sting of my situation long ago and demanded a different arrangement about money matters. Why, Aunt Regina herself probably considers me 'pretty poor potatoes.' That is why she treats me like a child. I'll go up to Elmscroft and have it out with her."

But he did not go up at once. To tell the truth, he shrank from any conference with his aunt on this subject. He had drifted so many years with the current that it took considerable to jar Stover Connorton loose from habit.

Several days passed and a new week was born. He knew that no word had come from Gordon Brayne, and he suspected that Millicent was very, very short of money. She was getting up early in the morning, reading the "want ads" with avidity, and starting forth at eight o'clock with a list of possible chances.

Mrs. Driggs confessed this to Connorton, for she was alone all day save for a neighbor's child. Millicent could have obtained any number of situations where the remuneration was six or seven dollars weekly; but such a sum would be of little use to her and her mother

The girl began to look so pale and haggard that Connorton grew very anxious He could not help her financially; indeed, she would not have allowed him had he been able to do so. She and her mother both spoke of the kindness of the undertaker in not presenting his bill. They had no idea that Connorton had impoverished himself for the quarter in staving off that particular debt.

He heard Mrs. Driggs thoughtlessly complain about the lack of certain little luxuries she had been used to; the look in Millicent's face when she heard this struck Connorton to the heart.

The thought of these two women suffering for the necessities of life, perhaps, filled him with such horror and alarm that he could scarcely contain himself.

He believed that if Enderly Driggs's pension was continued—as it should have been—Millicent would not refuse to accept it. Indeed, she could not.

Gordon Brayne should be urged to do something for the family of his old clerk. Without saying anything to the girl he ventured a second time to enter the Mirrivale Building.

Meantime he had advanced no further in his inquiry into the puzzling circumstances connected with Enderly Driggs's death. He could not see Professor Cramer for several days yet, and he shrank from interviewing the police surgeon or the ambulance doctor who had pronounced upon the case of the old clerk.

Connorton knew he was being followed almost every time he left his lodgings. Once he had turned and swiftly retraced his steps with the intention of catching the shadower. But the fellow was too sharp for him. He buried his face in a big silk handkerchief with a shamrock green border and sneezed vociferously as Connorton went by.

"God bless you!" the student ejaculated.

"An' the devil miss me!" was the muffled rejoinder—and Connorton wondered if the fellow was laughing at him!

At least the student could not connect this sturdy looking chap with the tall and sinister figure of the intruder who had ventured in at the window of the Driggs's apartment the night before the funeral of the old man. Nor for the very life of him could he imagine who would pay to have him shadowed in this way.

He entered the reception-room of the Brayne Operating Company on the seventh floor. He intended sending in his card to Gordon Brayne, believing that the multimillionaire promoter had not forgotten his name and might, indeed, be inclined to do him a favor

At least Brayne might grant him a brief

interview. Beyond that Connorton desired nothing for himself.

It was no easy matter, he found, to reach the head of the Brayne Operating Company without an appointment. The majesty of pelf is usually so hedged about with underlings that it is difficult indeed for an ordinary mortal to come face to face with the actual occupant of the throne.

The Cerberus at the gate was a young woman of very practical mien and a firm foot. She should, thought Connorton, have been a school-teacher, being distinctly of the pedagogic type. She examined the line of waiting applicants like a schoolma'am testing the capabilities of her pupils.

"Have you an appointment with Mr. Brayne?" was her routine speech. "If not I do not think you can see him to-day."

"Just get my card through to him, please, and I am quite sure you will prove yourself a poor prophet," Connorton told her when she gave him the formula.

"Yes? Your business?" She eyed him reflectively as though seeking to catalogue him with her other specimens.

"I could not possibly explain Mr. Brayne's private affairs to you, miss," Connorton said. "Really, you would better send my card in. If Mr. Brayne is not at liberty, why I can come again. But let him be the judge in this matter."

The young man's assurance and his way of putting the case, perhaps, was on the verge of carrying him through. She turned with Connorton's card in her hand and was about to give it to a runner—of whom there were several in uniform on a bench inside the rail—when a tall man with a quantity of iron-gray hair and eye-glasses crossed the reception room at the back.

"Wait! I will speak to Mr. Mole," the school teacher murmured.

Mole! Connorton scrutinized the private secretary closely. And in another moment Mr. Frederick Mole was returning the compliment while he listened to the young woman and twisted the visitor's card nervously in his fingers.

Finally he nodded briskly, cutting the young woman off short in her explanatory remarks, and strode directly to the rail near which Connorton stood.

"Mr. Stover Connorton?" he said, reading the card again.

"My name," admitted the student.

"You have a claim against the United Can Company, I believe? I remember. Mr. Brayne spoke particularly about you to me, Mr. Connorton." He smiled.

When Frederick Mole smiled it was with his lips and teeth only. None other of his features entered into the spasmodic change in the aspect of his countenance. One might have said that Mr. Mole's face merely slipped!

To have laughed aloud, Connorton thought, would have necessitated an entire metamorphosis of the Mole nature.

"I have not," began Connorton in denial to the private secretary, when the latter continued with.

"You have not yet seen our lawyer? Pardon! Our mistake, Mr. Connorton. I will see to it at once that he calls and adjusts your claim."

Again the smile. Somehow that grimace sent a chill through Stover Connorton. He was not particularly a nervous or apprehensive young man; but there was something of a threat—a deadly threat—in the private secretary's look.

Why? He had never met the man before. Indeed, he never remembered having even seen a man of Frederick Mole's figure and manner.

"I do not consider that I have any claim for damages upon Mr. Brayne's company," the student said finally. "I am not here to urge any personal matter of that kind."

"No?" Mr. Mole waited, still smiling. "What is your business, then?"

"It is with Mr. Brayne," Connorton declared sturdily

"I am afraid you do not understand," the private secretary said softly. "Unless you have an appointment with Mr. Brayne, or you are a personal friend, he cannot see you."

"Under no circumstances?"

"Under no circumstances," Mole assured him, and now the smile was gone. His lean jaw and determined lips were grim enough. It was a granite face the private secretary showed him.

"You must tell your business to me first," Mr. Mole said.

Connorton shook his head slowly. He was sure—it was intuition perhaps which so convinced him—that anything he might tell Frederick Mole about the necessities of the widow and daughter of Enderly Driggs would never reach the multimillionaire's ears.

"No," he said quietly. "I will seek some other way of bringing the matter to Mr. Brayne's attention."

"As you please," murmured Mole as Connorton turned away. Again the smile. And behind it, and behind the pince-nez, the basilisk glare.

## CHAPTER X.

### "THE HOUSE OF SILENCE."

HUNDREDS of similar visitors—the "importunate" did old John Hammond term them—were turned away from the offices of the Brayne Operating Company every day. But nobody ever went down in the swiftly dropping elevator from the seventh floor of the Mirrivale Building with more determination to circumvent the system that hedged about the head of the company, and to gain a personal interview with Gordon Brayne, than did Stover Connorton.

And, too, he was in a deeply reflective mood. Frederick Mole, he felt, possessed a sinister personality.

He had never seen the man before—or, *had* he? He knew nothing about him previous to this interview save that old Mr. Driggs had spoken bitterly of him. But the impression made upon Stover Connorton's mind at this meeting was one not easily erased.

His height, and the haggard look of the man—his thin, dexterous fingers and glittering glance—his catlike, nervous movements—

Mole had come into sight in the reception-room and had passed out of sight again like an evil shadow. An evil shadow!

Who had said that? Connorton was startled, harking back to the rainy night when he had watched beside the body of Enderly Driggs. That is how the young police officer spoke of the escaped intruder

"Like an evil shadow," Billy Clare had said. Frederick Mole fitted that phrase exactly.

And the man's smile! It was as shallow as though painted on a dish. Connorton felt that the private secretary could be a bad enemy.

"Of course he has no reason for feeling venomous toward me," he told himself. "And I'll see to it that he gets nothing on me

"It is Gordon Brayne I want to see—and I mean to see him in spite of twenty private secretaries.

"I do not believe he is a hard man to interview, once you've got past his guard. That's the way with these little men with a little authority. The angel of the flaming sword standing sentinel over the Garden of Eden never felt more importance than some of these little 'buffers' for big men.

"While the big men themselves—well, I had an experience with Gordon Brayne that day over on the Jersey Flats when the munitions-truck went off. He appeared as easy as a pair of old shoes. I do not believe he would deny me the privilege of walking up to him anywhere and speaking to him, if he was not otherwise engaged.

"Why, he even suggested that I call upon him. Not about any claim for damages. Great Scott! I believe Mole deliberately lied to me. He may have heard my name from Mr. Brayne, but in no such connection, I'll be bound.

"Humph! Thanks to old John Hammond, I know where his automobile usually waits for him after business hours, and I can catch him there—at the side entrance to the Mirrivale Building—and no thanks to Mr. Frederick Mole."

When Connorton reached home he found there a long letter from Aunt Regina. Although the mistress of Elmscroft did not say it in so many words, the student read that she desired to see him.

He sent a line to Millicent stating the cause of his absence from town—by this time he was almost a daily caller at the Driggs's apartment—and packed his bag for overnight. He had the pleasure of know-

ing that his faithful shadow went with him to the station, if no further.

He had so long mediated upon the change he desired to affect in his financial affairs that he welcomed, as almost providential, this chance to discuss the matter with his aunt. It would not seem as though he had come purposely to Elmscroft to ask a favor. Her letter, she knew, would draw him.

Aunt Regina had lost one of her more-or-less-faithful attendants. She infrequently had these domestic upheavals; for despite the liberal wages she paid, she demanded of her domestics, in some cases, more than human nature could easily bear.

Deaf-mutes trained to domestic service were difficult to obtain at best. And those willing to work at Elmscroft and able to talk with Aunt Regina by lip-reading, and to understand her as well, were few and far between.

When there was, therefore, trouble of this nature at the old homestead it was a serious matter. On this particular occasion the housekeeper had left Aunt Regina to be married. From the trend of the old lady's letter Connorton drew the conclusion that the defection of Mary for this cause had convinced Aunt Regina more strongly than ever that only sane people remained single!

This was no time, perhaps, to come out too openly with his own hopes regarding the marriage game, yet he nevertheless determined to try to make some arrangement with his aunt whereby he would in the future feel a measure of financial independence.

When he left the train at the little valley station in the evening, the heavens dripped as though weeping over the dreary aspect of the earth. Everything was wet and bedraggled, and the most cheerful thing he saw along the road, from the back seat of the jitney, was a hen the feathers of which looked as though she had stood under a rain-water spout!

The long, green arms of the elms standing beside the way waved a greeting to him as he mounted to the knoll on which the house of silence stood. Advancing up the steps to the broad veranda he met the mute footman, who showed him into the old and familiar living-room, with the balsam boughs heaped odorously in the fireplace and the shiny, haircloth mid-Victorian furniture. Connorton waited the appearance of his elderly relative, with the silence of the house gradually drugging him, as it always did.

She came at last—the most stately looking woman of four-foot-four, or thereabout, who ever walked in patent leather!

"My dear Stover! Every time I see you your gigantic proportions actually appal me."

"We cannot all be diminutive, Aunt Regina," he told her whimsically as she stood on tiptoe to meet his kiss. "There were always giants."

"But there never was a Connorton giant before you," she objected, backing away to obtain a better view of him. "I always lay it to your poor mother's family. Not at all like the Connortons, Stover—not at all. Decent people, thank Heaven! But not like *us*.

"You are just the same-looking fellow. As though your clothes grew on you and would not fit any other man. Distingué." She sighed contentedly. "Yes, you are a most satisfactory nephew, despite your gigantic proportions."

"You hearten me when you say it," he told her gravely. "I hope to continue your good opinion, Aunt Regina, even when I come to ask the favor I have in mind."

"Anything in my power—which is born of reason—is yours for the asking, Stover," she said quickly.

"But first of all tell me of your troubles. So Mary left you?"

And all this without one audible word being spoken between them!

Aunt Regina was pink-cheeked, bright-eyed, birdlike in the tilt of her head and "listening" attitude. Only, she did not listen, but watched. Her hearing had been irreparably lost when she was a girl. That was really why she had never married. She did not lose her power of speech as a result of her loss of hearing; but realizing that her voice was becoming harsh and ill-modulated because it was inaudible to herself, Miss Regina Connorton determined to make her wants known—and to communicate with the rest of the world—by other means.

The deaf-and-dumb language of signs was easily mastered. Then she learned lip reading. She commanded that all about her should use the same means of communication. Those domestics at Elmscroft who could not, or would not, learn the silent languages had to give place in time to deaf mutes, or to those who could acquire the language of signs and were proficient in lip reading.

Stover Connorton, as a child, learned both to enable him to communicate with Aunt Regina. When he came under her sole rule at ten years of age he was allowed to use no other means of communication. He was punished for talking out loud with old Abram Kovil, just as he was punished for birds'-nesting or stealing green apples!

Aunt Regina went on with: "Oh, Mary!" and then Connorton had to watch very closely indeed to apprehend all that the little woman had to say upon the subject of the old housekeeper's defection Somewhere in the deluge he managed to ask

"You say nobody is faithful? How about old Abram Kovil, Aunt Regina? Surely *he* remains the same?"

"Oh, Abram! I tell him he is a dead man," Aunt Regina rejoined with vast disgust. "Merely we have neglected to bury him. Positively he hasn't an idea fresher than ten years old."

For the little lady prided herself upon keeping up-to-date in most lines. Save, thought her nephew, in the modern treatment of grown-up wards

"Aunty," he asked her at the dinner-table that evening, after the mute footman had removed all but the wine and nuts, and had not yet announced coffee as served in the living-room. "Aunty, did it ever impress you that I am a man?"

"What have you done now?" she asked him coolly. "Usually when a male person speaks like that it is because he has done some particularly atrocious thing to prove he *is* a man."

The student could read this tart speech easily enough on the little old lady's mobile lips, and he smiled in appreciation. Aunt Regina's published objections to the opposite sex were mostly pose. The man she should have married, whom she had harshly driven from her side when she knew her affliction of deafness was permanent, she had never forgiven for marrying another woman'

"You must not expect me to be different from other men," Stover Connorton said. "I have all the usual frailties of my sex. I shall even wish to marry some time."

The little gentlewoman gazed upon him more keenly, and for a minute her lips were still

"What, Stover," she questioned at length –"you go the way of all flesh?"

"Some time," he repeated.

"Have you picked out the girl?"

"Perhaps. But I assure you she has shown no sign of picking out *me*."

"And what is it you wish me to do?"

"I want to feel as though I were in a position to ask a girl—if I should wish to—to marry me. I must have a stable income. I really, Aunt Regina, should be in some business which will afford me a livelihood."

"But I have plenty of money," she said. "Isn't that enough? Of course you would not marry a girl I did not approve of if you *must* marry?"

"I should hope not," he admitted.

"Then, why disturb yourself?" asked his aunt.

He had great difficulty in explaining to her his desire for the independent feeling of the self-supporting man. Nor could she believe that any girl would refuse him as a mate because he must refer to his aunt as his sole support.

"For of course all I have will be yours some day, Stover," Miss Connorton said. "I have no other heir."

"Suppose you should change your mind?"

"Am I fickle?" retorted the old lady, bridling.

"We never know what may happen to change our opinions."

He saw at once he had said too much. She eyed him suspiciously.

"Wait," she said. "We will sleep on this. I'll talk to you in the morning."

Then she reverted to the ingratitude of Mary. But at breakfast it was evident that the little old lady had been thinking of Connorton's suggestion to some purpose.

"I never considered that it would be necessary, Stover," she told him, "for you to have other support than I afforded you. Of course you have always done about as you pleased, and your studies seemed heretofore to make up the whole sum and substance of your existence.

"But if you really look forward to becoming a benedick, and must establish a home of your own, of course we will make some provision for such a change. I will increase your personal allowance; but to establish you in a business of which you know little, perhaps, and I know less—*that* does not seem to me the part of wisdom. I shall have to consult Beeton."

She ignored the expression of his face at this announcement. Beeton was her lawyer and man of business, and he and Connorton clashed.

"Of course, Stover, I am awfully curious to see the girl," and she laughed.

Her nephew blushed, for the bringing of Millicent into the discussion, when he was not at all sure she cared anything for him save in a sisterly way, did not please him at all.

"We won't talk of any particular girl, Aunt Regina," he said firmly, "until I am in a position to go to a *particular* girl and ask her to marry me. You see, I do not want a girl who *isn't* particular."

"I see," she nodded, and flirted a check toward him across the breakfast-table. Then asked: "With that in your pocket, will you feel sufficiently independent to talk to such a 'particular' girl? And you must bring her here to see me."

He pushed the check back. He spoke gently, forgetting merely to mouth his reply.

"I cannot accept this, Aunt Regina Not that I would not be grateful for it if it were offered in a different spirit. But I am trying to tell you that I am no longer a boy. I am grown up. I have wasted much time—"

"Wasted much time, Stover?" she repeated. "It was a waste of time, then, to live as a gentleman should, and as I have wished you to?"

"It has been wasted time unless it leads to some independent establishment for my future," he declared firmly

"I do not understand you, Stover," she said, playing with the check with nervous fingers. "You do not want this?"

"I will not take it," he corrected. "I must feel some measure of independence before I can ask any girl to come and see you."

The little lady looked upon her big nephew very sternly. "Then you would marry her whether I approved or not?" she demanded.

"I must certainly choose a wife—if I have one at all—for myself," he told her.

"Humph! I will speak to Beeton," she said, and tore the check across. "He will be up to-day or to-morrow. Those Braynes have been trying to get me to sell the west eighty and the strip along the back road. It will square their line, you know. I don't see why such people should wish to push themselves into this neighborhood."

"But," Connorton said, rather surprised, "they're not a bad sort, are they? I believe Mrs. Brayne is a very lovely lady."

"New rich," scoffed his aunt, shrugging her shoulders. "At least, the old families of the Valley have blood—and a history. Who ever heard of the name of Brayne until there was a mort of money attached to it?"

"Then you are quite as determined as ever not to sell?" he ruminated.

"I shall not part with an acre of Elmscroft if I can help it. I have told Beeton so before. But he seems to think there is something to talk about. So he will come. I will have him consider your affair instead," added the old lady complacently.

Connorton wandered about the grounds smoking an after-breakfast cigar. The rain of the night had washed everything clean and the sun was fast drying the earth. Already warm odors of ripening grass and flowers drifted up from the meadows.

He hailed with raised arm old Abram Kovil, pottering about in the kitchen garden. Abram could talk well enough, although he, too, was as deaf as an adder. But he obeyed Aunt Regina's orders while on the place unless Connorton tempted him to break silence.

This was a strange environment, this Elmscroft, as Connorton often thought. Even the old dog that ran at him fiercely

and ended in wagging a friendly tail, did not bark.

There were acres upon acres of barren fields and uplands attached to the estate. Elmscroft farm proper was a small, compact, and well-paying affair. But that land that the Braynes wished to add to their country estate had never paid the owners of Elmscroft a penny, and never would.

"Now, if it was me, I'd be neighborly with Gordon Brayne—I expect," reflected Connorton. "Whether he was deliberately guilty of those two deaths in his private elevator, or had any part in the tragedies, I can't help liking the fellow. He attracts me. I wonder if I should try and say a good word for him to Aunt Regina?

"I guess not. I would better keep my finger out of the pie. Besides, if Seth Beeton is trying to get her to make the deal, there is probably something wrong with it. I wouldn't trust Beeton's disinterestedness.

"And just now it's my cue to keep whist—if I expect Aunt Regina to do anything at all as I want her to!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD.

THERE was little more he could say to Aunt Regina regarding his personal and financial desires. That subject was one he dared not approach again unless she should broach it.

There was so much at stake—so much that touched nearly himself and Millicent—that he shrank from doing anything to annoy the mistress of Elmscroft.

Like most deaf people she was very sensitive. That was why she demanded that all about her should live in a world of silence as she herself did. She was jealous of the ability of other people to hear. But she really did love Connorton, and the young man knew it and was accordingly grateful.

She wished to order out the car when it came time for him to go, to take him to the station. The mute footman acted as chauffeur. But to tell the truth, Connorton did not care to be driven by a dummy. Of course, the man could hear well enough, or he would never have obtained a license, even with Aunt Regina's influence behind him.

A jitney bus passed hourly the foot of the lane and he told Miss Connorton he would take that as usual.

"I will talk your matter over with Beeton when he comes, nephew," she assured him. "It is something that needs to be reflected upon."

"I hope you will try to see it from my standpoint, Aunt Regina," he said earnestly. "I can hope for no acquiescence on the part of Beeton."

"There you go again, Stover," she responded, shaking her head. "Beeton is the one person who I can trust to look out for my interests. I pay him well to do so and he knows he will never make a cent out of me save in legitimate transactions."

"Humph!" was her nephew's only rejoinder.

With his bag he walked away from the old house and down the lane to the highway. There was a breeze ruffling the roadside weeds; but the sun was scorching.

He heard the drumming of an automobile engine before he debouched from the shaded lane; and the nose of a flivver poked in from the highway. He could not mistake the figure driving the small car.

The car came to an asthmatic stop. "My dear Stover! You are a sight for sore eyes. I trust your dear aunty is well?"

"You will find her so—and with all her faculties unimpaired, Beeton, I believe," the young man assured the man of business, without halting. "She is expecting you."

"But you are in haste?" called the other after him.

"I'm for the station. The bus will be along shortly," Connorton threw back over his shoulder. A tête-à tête with Seth Beeton was about the last thing he ever desired. He heard the flivver start again and plow on up the lane to Elmscroft.

He was a few minutes in advance of the usual bus time; but along the road was approaching a second automobile, headed for the railroad-station. It was not the bus; in a moment he identified it as a powerful touring-car, painted green.

"Looks like that machine of Gordon Brayne's," murmured the student. "That livery on the chauffeur looks the same. It *is* the same! And Mrs. Brayne is the only passenger."

The big car steamed along to the lane, and passed. Connorton was not sure that the lady of the veils saw him; he could scarcely expect that she would recognize him.

Nevertheless, he raised his hat as he stood there in the shade with his bag at his feet. She must have communicated very swiftly with the chauffeur—by an electric annunciator it was likely—for the car halted within a few yards of where Connorton was standing.

Mrs. Brayne looked back at him and beckoned with her gloved hand. He was quite amazed that the millionaire's lady should wish to speak to him; but he picked up his bag and strode to the automobile.

"Are you going New Yorkward, Mr. Connorton?" she asked him

"I am waiting for the bus that runs to the Quehawket railroad-station. There is a train down at noon, Mrs. Brayne."

"If you will get in I will take you over the road much more quickly and pleasantly than the train. And you will be welcome."

There was a graciousness in her tone and manner that convinced Connorton that she, at least, felt friendly toward him. He had no reason to doubt her frankness.

"It's mighty kind of you," he said heartily. "You won't have to ask me twice."

She smiled—he could see the brilliancy of it behind her veils—and the chauffeur pushed the lever that unlatched the tonneau door.

Connorton tossed in his bag and would have taken the seat facing Mrs. Brayne; but she motioned for him to sit beside her.

"It quite startled me to see you standing there, Mr. Connorton," she said, as the engine began to purr again. "I just wanted to ask somebody who *knew* a question. And of course you know."

"Now you flatter me," responded the student, smiling. "Do I look as though I carried so much knowledge under my hat?"

She laughed gaily. "On this subject—yes. That is your aunt's place Elmscroft?"

"It is, Mrs. Brayne," and he grew serious. He remembered what Aunt Regina had said about the Braynes desiring to buy a part of the back end of the old farm.

"Then you can tell me, I am sure, if that was Mr. Seth Beeton who just drove into the lane in the small auto? He was so far away I could not be sure. I know that Mr. Beeton is your aunt's business representative."

"Yes That was he," Connorton said, briefly. If Mrs. Brayne desired to talk about Beeton—or about Aunt Regina's affairs—all right. But he would not lead in the conversation

She had put aside her veils to talk to him, and he obtained a more intimate view of her features than ever before. Mrs. Brayne was, as Millicent had said, a very lovely woman; but of a type exactly opposite that of the girl in whom Connorton was so much interested. She was very blond, her hair almost flaxen, her complexion as pink and flawless as an infant's; but with violet eyes in which burned a lambent flame that few blue eyes possess.

There was nothing doll-like about the wife of Gordon Brayne, either in figure or face. And she possessed all the grace and manner of the well-born and well-bred woman

"My husband and I have met Mr. Beeton in a business way," the lady continued. "Rather a queer character, isn't he?"

"Possibly," was the student's non-committal reply.

"I mean he seems so," she hastened to add. "Of course, I do not know him well. I I cannot really make him out."

"There is just one man who knows Seth Beeton well -and he doesn't dare tell all he knows," Connorton said, dryly.

"Who—whom do you mean?" she asked, puzzled.

"Seth Beeton himself," the young man explained. "You have asked the wrong person, Mrs. Brayne, if you want to know much about Beeton. I'm not a friend of his. Nor am I, I suppose, his enemy."

"You do not trust him?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, I can answer that! He is only to be trusted never to do Seth Beeton an ill turn. He'll tell you that himself."

"Oh! I know what you mean. *That* is one of the reasons why I am curious about him. He—he seems so ingenious."

"Yes. He seems so," Connorton said grimly. "But I try to keep tabs on him in his conduct of Aunt Regina's affairs. To date, and after many years of his conduct of her affairs, I do not think he is a penny short in his accounts. Some day I expect there will be a grand explosion."

Mrs. Brayne was suddenly very serious His last expression had evidently changed the current of her thought

"That explosion on the bridge that day! Will you ever forget it, Mr. Connorton?" she murmured. "We were at some distance; but the roar of it seemed to deafen me, and my nerves have not ceased to quiver at the remembrance of it. Immediately the mounted policeman told us it was a load of shells from the United Can Company, I was horror-stricken."

"Why?" he ventured to ask.

"Oh!" She halted, gazing at him closely and perhaps with some suspicion, his query had come so quickly. "Naturally I was troubled for Mr. Brayne's sake. My husband being the head of the Can Company. And so much is being printed in the newspapers about the recklessness of the munitions-makers. I was worried for fear that he was indirectly, of course, connected with another—I mean, that if people were hurt, his company would be blamed. Such a tragedy - "

Her hesitation and confusion were almost pitiable. "I see," Connorton said, calmly, and was glad that she changed the topic of conversation again.

"It was an awful affair," she sighed. "Your friend—the young lady who was with you—must have been sorely frightened."

"She was indeed," he admitted.

"A very attractive young woman."

"I found her to be such. It was the first time we had met. We were thrown together, as you might say, from the bridge," and the young man smiled again.

"How romantic!" cried Mrs. Brayne. Yet her face retained its serious expression. "You—you have seen much of her since?"

"Quite a little. That would be natural, would it not? Companions in adventure, you know."

She sighed again then smiled. "The young woman seemed fearful of having her identity known. She—she shrank from us, I noticed."

Connorton noted the use of "us"; but he only said and with calmness: "Naturally she did not wish to be mixed up in the affair"

"It was no fear, or dislike, for Mr. Brayne and myself that made her shrink from us?"

"She did not tell me so at the time," Connorton said quite truthfully. "She's not a girl who would care to court publicity."

"You have become fond of her?" Mrs Brayne asked, with some little hesitation. Yet Connorton could not be offended. He smiled.

"You have guessed it, madam."

"Ah! You are still young, Mr. Connorton."

"I should hope so!" he cried cheerfully.

"My husband—if you care for his opinion—thought you possessed a quick mind."

"I was flattered by his opinion," the student admitted, but with gravity. He turned the subject of their conversation from personalities. He could not tell this beautiful and charming lady what he, on his part, thought of Gordon Brayne!

There was a strange air about Mrs. Gordon Brayne. Connorton had noted it the first time he had seen her –a strained, tense, fearful air as though she lived in expectation of some calamity

It was less marked to-day as they rode swiftly cityward in the big green car. Yet it was there. No woman, living the sheltered life of ease Gordon Brayne's wife supposedly lived, should display such nervous apprehension.

Even in discussing trivialities her thought seemed to be skimming merely the surface of what they talked about, while deep in her mind swirled waters of bitter reflection

A beautiful woman, with every outward

appearance of ease and prosperity; yet with something secret gnawing at her heart.

It gave Connorton food for reflection. She possessed a certain charm that held the young man's interest chained while he was with her and afterward, as well. He was glad he had met her in this easy, familiar way.

He said nothing, of course, of his attempt to see Gordon Brayne at his office. Much as he was determined to obtain aid for Millicent and her mother, he would not confide the matter to Mrs. Brayne. Connorton had his own plan to circumvent the secretary, Mole. He was not minded to beg a woman's help.

In addition, he did not care to have Gordon Brayne forewarned of his purpose.

The big green car set him down not far from his rooms. He went across town to Millicent's after dinner. She had something to tell him—something that made her for the moment more cheerful.

"I have a situation, Stover," she said, calling him by his first name—a slip that quite delighted Connorton. He believed that in secret she must think of him much more familiarly than she was willingly openly to admit.

"I got it through my advertisement. It doesn't pay all I need. Only twelve dollars. In a real-estate office. But the gentleman says he does not care if I do outside work in office hours, providing I do his work first. He says it looks good for business to have the girl in the office always employed. So we shall make out."

Connorton looked at her with some doubt in his mind if it was not expressed in his countenance. How long would she be able to bear up under such labor as this she proposed to accept?

"Who is the man you are going to work for?" was all he asked.

"The office is on One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. Real estate and insurance is the principal business; but I believe the proprietor is something of a lawyer."

She gave him a card and it was with a shock that Connorton read on it the name of his aunt's man of business, Seth Beeton, as president of the concern.

"I'm getting superstitious," the student mumbled to himself, Millicent being called from the room on some domestic errand. "Something tells me that old Seth and I are to run afoul of each other. 'By the pricking of my thumbs'"

## CHAPTER XII.

### BEARDING THE LION.

It was late when Connorton left the Driggs apartment, and at the nearest corner the officer on duty bade him good night.

"The same to you, Officer Clare," returned the student, recognizing the policeman. "It's a much pleasanter night than that of our former meeting."

"Eh? Oh! You've right to say so," agreed Billy Clare, twirling his club. "That was some rain. By the way, Mr. Connorton, did ye ever catch another glimpse of that tall, thin laddybuck that tried the second-story game that night?"

"Never," Connorton returned with assurance.

"Is it so, now? Nor ye didn't get no line on why he shinned up them ladders to take a squint at the old man in his coffin?"

Connorton smothered an ejaculation, saying coolly: "I took your opinion as that of an expert. You said he was a second story thief."

"Huh!" grunted Billy Clare. "But he didn't fit the description of any gun that's ever worked these Harlem flats. 'Tis a puzzle, sir."

"So it seems," agreed the student, about to walk on without further discussion of the matter. Billy Clare was inclined to be "nosey."

"You weren't out of town long, Mr. Connorton?" added Billy, with an inflection that made Connorton look back.

"How's that?" he asked. "What do *you* know about my being away?"

"Just happened to hear you went out of town overnight, sir. Up to Quehawket. They tell me you have an aunt living up there. Up near Gordon Brayne's country place, eh?"

Connorton's brows drew together sternly.

"They seem to tell you a good many things," he said, "that cannot by any possibility concern you, Officer Clare."

The other was not at all feezed. His grin was as broad and his eyes twinkled as merrily as ever.

"Sure, sir, I listen to all the news floating about the neighborhood. Ye never know when something ye hear and have stored away may come in handy."

"I hope you do not store away information about me, expecting to find it useful some day—when I crack a safe, for instance?" grumbled Connorton.

"Ah, no, sir. But there might something happen you some day, sir—something mysterious, ye know," said Billy Clare with his head on one side

"Me uncle, Dan Costigan, is one of the old-fashioned kind of cops. He gets 'em by bull luck and knowin' from long exparience what's goin' on inside the heads of these guns

"But not me. That's old stuff. If I'm goin' to be a fly-cop I'll have something modern to offer—believe me!" and the young officer's enthusiasm waxed warm

"I don't want to know what these cheap yeggs and dips think. They ain't got much in their domes anyway but a few dope dreams. Most of 'em haven't any use for what's above their ears but to hang their hats on it—believe me!

"They're sly and wicked like a rat. They're never interesting. The folks that have real mysteries happen to them are respectable, decent folk. Trouble comes to them that ain't looking for it—and don't you let nobody tell you diff'rent.

"Now, you might be in the very middle of a big mystery, Mr. Connorton, and be keepin' it to yourself. *You* ain't the kind that runs to tell their troubles to a fat cop—not you.

"So I says," pursued Billy Clare, the modern *Dupin*, "that it's folks like you that interest me. If I get into my nut all your habits and tastes and the slant of your mind about things—your opinion, I mean—if anything should happen you, I'd be on the job with a lot of first-hand info' that would be of value. See?"

"Billy Clare, you're a ghoul," declared Connorton with disgust. Then, seeing the puzzlement expressed on the young officer's visage, he added: "Do you know what a ghoul is?"

"Sure, sir, it's something to do with that silly golf game," was the unblushing reply of one of New York's finest!

"Ah!" commented Connorton, passing on, "if you hit all your goals as safely as *that*, you will make your mark on the detective police—I don't think!"

A certain shrewdness interspersed with a frank simplicity, Connorton believed, marked Billy Clare's character.

"One of these boys fed up on five-cent literature, I've no doubt. A breathless follower of the weekly adventures of *Dick Random* or of *Deadeye Dick, the Detective*. The prosaic duties of a cop must be trying indeed to such a romance-loving nature."

He gave no further thought to Billy Clare. There were too many other, and more serious things to feed his reflections.

Risen to the surface of his troubled mind was his anxiety for the health of Millicent. She had changed so during these weeks since he first knew her! Her dark beauty had lost much of its brilliancy; there was a haunting expression of trouble in her eyes that harassed the student.

Now, too, he was additionally disturbed that she was to work for Seth Beeton. From childhood he had disliked that man. Seth Beeton was one of those individuals who in passing a small boy in his first trousers and with his small hands in his pockets, cannot forebear smoothing the said youngster's hair down over his eyes and calling him "sonny." Many a youth in the early knickerbocker stage has been tempted to run away and become a pirate for less reason!

Not alone did Connorton feel anxiety because of the character of the man Millicent was to work for. How long would she be able to support herself and her mother under such a strain?

And he could not help her. His purse was so low that—even would the girl have accepted it—he could not loan her a dollar. He was almost sorry he had not taken Aunt Regina's check. There might have

been some way of using it for Millicent's benefit. And it was drawn to a generous figure.

There was but one way, as far as he could see, in which the widow and daughter of Enderly Driggs could be financially aided. He went home and to bed, determined to carry out his original plan to interview Gordon Brayne on the subject—and on the morrow

This was the day on which he could see Professor Cramer again, and he stopped at the laboratory on his way down-town. The savant seemed to welcome his appearance on this occasion with more warmth than usual.

"'Think of the devil,'" he briefly quoted. "Here you are, Stover. I can make handy use of you. Take off your coat. There's an apron yonder. Here's a pair of gloves. Put them on if you would save your lily-white hands from being stained."

"Speaking of stains," said the student, obeying instructions without question. "What did you make out of that photograph I left with you?"

"Pipe-lights," Professor Cramer said. "You have the plate, I presume?"

"Yes. And other prints," Connorton admitted. But his countenance expressed his disappointment.

"Humph! Sorry I didn't notice what I was doing. The frugality of the Yankee, you know," and he pointed to the vase on his mantel-shelf filled with spills.

"And you did not discover a thing about it?"

"I did not say so. I made some experiments the day you were here, but to little purpose. If you'd brought me the man's hand—the hand itself instead of a picture of it—I might have found out something worth while. There! be careful you don't slop any of this stuff on your clothes. It stains."

"Was *that* merely a stain on the dead hand?" reflected Connorton aloud

"It was *not*," Professor Cramer said quickly. "Under the microscope it was plain to be seen that the texture of the cuticle and the flesh fibers had been partially destroyed. It was deeper than a stain even an acid stain. There! That's done Thanks."

"You did look into it a bit, then, before you made a pipelight of the photo?" Connorton pursued, drawing off the rubber gloves reflectively. "Can't you go any deeper into it, professor? Here is another print of the man's hand. I'm awfully interested in the matter. It it's important."

Professor Cramer brought his thick lenses to bear upon the photograph

"I tell you what I believe, Stover," he said, in his quick, jerky way. "It's a burn. Some scorching fire discolored the skin of that hand. Heat shriveled those flesh fibers. That is my belief. But I see no way of proving it without experimenting upon a *corpus* and comparing results with the scar on the man's palm. And you say he's buried?"

"He is."

"You give me nothing to work on," complained Professor Cramer. "I can't help you any further unless I can experiment."

Connorton came away from the laboratory in no hopeful frame of mind. A burn? Well, he had thought that himself. But what kind of a burn could it be? And how could Millicent's father have suffered such an injury within, as it seemed, such a very short time of his death?

That private elevator! Used every day by Gordon Brayne and his intimates. Why should it have been the scene of two tragedies?

Ten years ago the stenographer, Sadie Phelps. Now the superannuated clerk, Enderly Driggs. It was a puzzle—a puzzle

He walked to the nearest subway station and as was his custom spied about for the fellow with the green hat-band. There he stood on the corner of Broadway, looking into a store window

"I'd like to know what that chap is made of," the student thought, with sudden vexation, starting to cross the street.

But forewarned by Connorton's reflection in the window-pane, the operative slipped around the corner and the student gave it up. It was not his fault that he did not spy the fellow following him into the sub-

way kiosk. Connorton was thinking of something else by that time

He entered the Mirrivale Building through the tunnel, as Enderly Driggs had done on that fatal Friday, and like him found the stairway to the side hall. It was empty and so was the anteroom which John Hammond, the porter, had told Connorton belonged to Brayne's suite of offices.

The young man found with little difficulty the sliding panel that masked the entrance to the private elevator shaft. The unknowing might easily pass it over.

The elevator car was at the sixth floor: but the door above being closed, and knowing how similar elevators at the colleges worked, Connorton succeeded in starting the mechanism which brought the cage down to his level. He opened the grilled door noiselessly.

Here was the compartment in which old Driggs had died. When the porter had opened this door just as Connorton now rolled it back—the body had slid out across the threshold of the elevator cage. A gruesome place indeed.

He stepped thoughtfully into the car and looked about. The mechanism that controlled it was a little different from that of the self-running elevators at the colleges.

Here there was a sliding switch at the left governed by a flat metal knob. After the panel in the wall was closed the grilled door of the cage likewise must be latched before that sliding switch could throw the electrically driven mechanism into gear.

With his hand still on the doorlatch he moved the switch over. The car rose smoothly. At the sixth floor the switch shifted automatically and the car stopped with a slight jar.

"We have arrived," Connorton muttered.

He opened the door of the cage without a sound. Then he slid the panel softly back.

He looked into the enormous room with its plain furnishings and the huge desk at its far end

The burly figure of Gordon Brayne was at this desk, his shoulder turned toward the elevator as he wrote. No other person was in the room or on the balcony which half encircled it.

Gordon Brayne's pen continued to race across the page before him. Connorton stepped quietly out upon the soundless carpet.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### OPEN WAR

THERE was a moment when Stover Connorton quailed. But that was before Brayne spoke or gave any sign that he apprehended the student's presence in the great room.

He saw the man at the desk glance up, then fix his gaze upon the crystal block that served him for a mirror. He dropped his pen, too, and his hairy right hand hovered over the row of push buttons at the edge of the desk as though he were undecided which of his underlings to summon to meet this impudent visitor.

Suddenly he spoke: "To what am I indebted for this visit, Mr. Connorton?"

"To the success of your secretary, Mr. Mole, in keeping me from entering by the usual way. Therefore I was obliged to make use of the unusual," Connorton coolly replied. He knew by the flush that had risen in Brayne's face, now turned to him as he approached the desk, that the great man was more than a little vexed

"You have used a means to reach me that only my personal staff and a few friends know of," said Brayne.

"Enderly Driggs used it," Connorton observed.

The other started. His black brows drew together in a scowl of portent.

"Explain that remark. What did you know of Enderly Driggs? What are you here for? Surely you are aware that I have no time in business hours for idle chatter. I do not understand the purpose of your call."

"Enderly Driggs is my text," the student said directly. "I knew him. Now I know his family's circumstances—their necessities. You supported Driggs and his invalid wife and his daughter for ten years. It was a bare living that Driggs obtained here each week. Now they are penniless." Connorton saw that he had the multi-

millionaire's full attention from his first sentence. The flush had died out of his face and his expression softened as Brayne asked

"What is this you tell me? I believe you to be a truthful young man, Mr. Connorton. Indeed, until this moment, I have been prejudiced in your favor. Could I benefit you—"

"I am not here in my own behalf," the visitor said quickly. "Nothing less than what seems an injustice to my friends, Mrs. Driggs and her daughter, would have brought me here—especially in this way. And that because I was denied entrance through the usual channels."

"You saw Mr. Mole?" asked Brayne.

"Yes."

"He knew your name?"

"I gave him my card. He said I must tell my business to him. I preferred not."

"Ah, yes," Gordon Brayne observed more cheerfully. "Old Mole is a stickler for red tape. And yet he saves me much valuable time because of this which was, in your case, Mr. Connorton, a fault. But your reaching me in this way—"

"I chanced to be informed of the locality of your private elevator. Naturally, as Mr. Driggs died in it. I found that Millicent—Miss Driggs—was too proud to call your attention to their situation. She and her mother have no income since her father's pension ceased."

"Are you sure that is a fact, Mr. Connorton?" Gordon Brayne asked sharply.

"It is positive."

"I was quite differently informed. I was told that old Driggs had bought an annuity with the money I have given him and that his family was well taken care of."

"You were misinformed," Connorton said. "The young woman is going to work in a poorly paid situation and hires a child to attend upon her sometimes helpless mother during the day. I tell you they come close to lacking the necessities of life, Mr. Brayne. And the piled-up debts of the old man's funeral—"

"I did not know this," Gordon Brayne interposed, Connorton's earnestness impressing him. "The funeral expenses I will assume."

"The undertaker has been paid by friends," Connorton hastened to inform him. "It is some regular provision that they most need, Mr. Brayne. It should be given to Mrs. Driggs, and then the daughter who is foolishly proud, I think may not refuse it. All that Driggs received from you during these years furnished them a bare livelihood. I believed the last few years, had it not been for the daughter's added efforts toward support, would have been lean years indeed for the family."

"I was not so informed," Gordon Brayne repeated. "I will consider the matter, Mr. Connorton, at more leisure. Of course, old Driggs had been a faithful employee in my uncle's time. And I had some personal interest in him myself. He broke me in," and he smiled. "He was my superior here for some time."

There was something very winning in his smile. The student felt that he could not be long under the influence of Mr. Gordon Brayne without losing any animosity or suspicion that he might have held against him

"The old man wore out, I fear, in our service. You know, of course, Mr Connorton, that he was not altogether right in his mind the last few years of his life?"

"That could be easily seen," Connorton admitted

"A babbler—a silly old babbler," sighed Brayne. "He had no legal claim upon the Operating Company, you understand. I could not acknowledge that. Nor have his family." He said this firmly.

"Neither legal, nor any other claim," the student agreed, "that you have any reason to acknowledge, save the claim of ancient service, as you say, on the part of Enderly Driggs, and the need of his widow and daughter."

"I see," said the big man, nodding and watching Connorton reflectively.

"If their situation should change I know that the young woman would so inform you and ask you to cease your kindness. She is proud"

"She is the very beautiful young lady you were with the day of that explosion, Mr. Connorton?" Gordon Brayne suddenly interposed.

"Well -yes." Connorton admitted it with some confusion.

"I saw you were much interested in the young woman then," the other said. "And your own circumstances? Pardon my curiosity. It is not idle."

"I have not until lately considered the necessity of earning money much money, I mean," the student hesitated. "I have a small income. Of late I have come to the conclusion that it would be desirable to get into some business."

"I might be able to find a round hole for you—somewhere. If you are not a square peg," the millionaire said. "Would you consider it?"

"Thank you, Mr. Brayne. I certainly would gratefully consider any situation you might offer me."

"It's a bargain, then," said Gordon Brayne heartily, giving him his hand in dismissal. "As for the case of old Driggs's family, it shall have my immediate attention." He punched the first button in the row. "By the way, Mr. Connorton, Mrs. Brayne says she enjoyed your company down from Quehawket yesterday."

"She was kind enough to remember me when she chanced to see me forlornly waiting at the roadside," Connorton told him. "I had been visiting my aunt."

"Oh, she remembered you all right. In fact, we have frequently spoken of you and the young lady. So she is old Driggs's daughter? I had no idea at the time," Gordon Brayne said reflectively.

The door at the top of the stairs opened and the slim figure of Mole, the secretary, appeared descending from the balcony.

"A pretty girl. A very beautiful girl," the big man said. "And she did not wish me to know her name that day of the explosion. Why was that, Mr. Connorton?"

Connorton had expected the question. "You will have to ask her that yourself, Mr. Brayne. I could not say. Miss Driggs is not just like the usual girl."

"Who let that fellow in here?" Mole demanded harshly—not at all as an inferior should speak before his superior, Connorton noted. Then, as his gaze swept the room and lighted upon the open elevator door, the secretary added: "Ah! Sneaked in, did he? I can assure you, Mr. Brayne, that I halted his former attempt. I have a report from the lawyer on his case. He has already refused any indemnity for such damages as he may have sustained through that munitions explosion."

"You misunderstand the occasion of Mr. Connorton's call, Mole," the big man said gently. "You see, he arrived by the way of our private elevator. Connorton, it seems, was a friend of old Driggs—is here, in fact, as a representative of Driggs's widow."

The change in Mole's face was such that Connorton was startled. The pulse in the secretary's cheeks seemed to throb and in their hollows quick fire burned. His gaze, fixed upon the young man, was malevolent.

"You seem to have been misinformed regarding the situation of old Driggs's family, Mole," pursued Brayne serenely. "They are not happily taken care of. Driggs's death left them penniless, Mr. Connorton assures me."

"I accepted the statement of one whom I thought should know," mumbled the secretary.

"Well, we must do something for old Driggs's widow and daughter," Gordon Brayne said. "You know, he was your boss as well as mine, once."

"I know he was a confounded pest around here for years," snarled the secretary. "And his wife and daughter are trying to blackmail you through this fellow, I have no doubt. Like them!"

His sneer brought the hot blood to the student's countenance. His eye flamed.

"What do you mean?" he cried, and two strides brought him face to face with the secretary. "Repeat that—*if you dare.*"

Brayne said nothing. Before the indignant gaze of Connorton, Mole's eyes fell. He still sneered

"Hoity-toity!" he said. "This cock crows."

"I'll do more than crow—you dastard!" threatened the student. "What you know of Mrs. Driggs and her daughter leads to no such conclusion as you have just uttered before your employer. Deny that libelous statement—at once!"

Gordon Brayne raised a warning hand, but he did not speak. Mole was all but suffocated with wrath. He was—in the end a coward. The threat of personal violence always cows the cunning and venomous character

"This fellow is a ruffian," he complained, speaking now to Brayne. "Shall I call the officer?"

"You would better withdraw your statement, if you know it to be untrue," advised Gordon Brayne

"You cannot expect me personally to investigate all minor matters, Mr. Brayne," snarled Mole. "My time is fully occupied."

"True"

"I—I had a report upon the Driggs matter. Personally I—I know nothing about the family," stammered the secretary. "I was never at the house. I do not remember just where they live, in fact. I had no personal interest in Driggs."

Connorton had been watching the secretary intently. He leaned forward, scrutinizing with tense interest his figure, his face, his mannerisms, as he spoke

"You had no interest in Mr. Driggs until after he was dead, perhaps?" he asked the secretary, quietly.

"What do you mean?"

Mole swung back to face the student, glaring at him, his thin lips parted to expose his teeth—the grimace of a snarling dog

Connorton's manner was now utterly cool and unruffled. He was preparing to depart and taking his gloves from his pocket, slowly drew on the left one, his stick under his arm. He said:

"I fancied you felt some little interest in the unfortunate old man after his death, Mr. Mole. Are you quite sure you have so soon forgotten where he lived, and where his body lay in its coffin that rainy Saturday night?"

"What's this? What's this?" demanded Gordon Brayne, and with sharpness. "What's the matter with you, Mole?"

The secretary was leaning heavily on the desk, glaring at Connorton as though entranced. The latter dismissed the matter with a gesture.

"I'll leave you two to talk it over," he said, turning toward the elevator. "Perhaps Mr. Mole can give you some information about old Driggs that he has not as yet volunteered, Mr. Brayne. Good day."

He had finished drawing on the glove. He grasped his stick firmly, bowed to the silent man at the big desk, and approached the elevator. As he was about to put his foot over the threshold, Mole moved

Stover Connorton shot a glance back at the malignant figure of the secretary. The latter had reached the near side of the desk. He leaned upon it, his hand hovering over the row of push buttons. Did he have it in his mind to summon the private watchman who had his station in the outer office?

"What are you about, Mole?" Gordon Brayne demanded sharply.

Connorton gave neither of them further attention. He entered the elevator and slid the panel shut. He latched the car door and started the mechanism simultaneously.

Not until he stepped out of the car into the anteroom below did he observe that he had drawn upon his hand by mistake one of the rubber gloves he had used so recently in Professor Cramer's laboratory.

"Humph!" quoth Stover Connorton. "I certainly am rattled to-day, and no mistake. What will old Cramer think of me?"

What Gordon Brayne, or Frederick Mole, thought of him just at this moment he did not care.

He was changing the gloves reflectively, putting on those required by custom, when somebody passed the door of this lower anteroom to Gordon Brayne's private office. Connorton merely caught a glimpse of the figure; it was familiar.

Instantly he gave chase. The fact that he was followed and spied upon whenever he left his rooms suddenly stung the student to wrath. Perhaps the measure of temper he had unleashed in Gordon Brayne's office immediately before, served to spur this emotion.

He sprang after the fellow with the green hat-band, bent upon demanding an explanation here and now.

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# OLD TIMES ON THE CENTRAL PACIFIC.

## Random Recollections of Railroad and Frontier Life in the Days of Stanford and Mackay.

BY OLIVER ROBERTS.

I WAS just sitting out here under a coconut-tree, fighting skeeters, when along came some reminiscences of old times on the Central Pacific—of the days when they were just building the road. The construction gang had got as far as Elko, Nevada. It was in winter, and mighty cold, too.

The temperature along a small belt there drops to as low as forty-five degrees below. This lasts only for a few days; but everybody could, or did, live in tents in those days. The eating-house was a tent; saloons and gambling-houses were tents; bunk-houses and stables were tents. So when zero weather came everybody suffered.

Well, there were some tough mugs then, and some that just ran the bluff that they were tough. The "three-card monte" man and the "tin-horn" gambler flourished.

Then there was the cowpuncher, because all about Elko is a stock-raising country. These cowpunchers often rode through the camp to show the gang how "it" was really done. They would get their old Colt cap-and-ball navy pistols out and shoot the air full of holes, then ride up to a tent, pull out a knife and cut a hole through the side.

Old "Beefsteak Bill" had an eating-house at Elko, and was getting along just fine. Once in a while one of these cowpunchers would come around, pull up to a table and yell out:

"Bill, get that porterhouse steak rare; see? And two white-wings, sunny-side up (fried eggs), and some nice fried potatoes. And, say! Don't forget that plate of fried mush and maple sirup; and hot cakes. And have the coffee black and strong."

The stuff would be brought on, and, when eaten, there would come the cry:

He Wanted Fresh Strawberries.

"Hey, Bill! Bring me a dish of fresh strawberries."

Well, Bill would say:

"Now, be reasonable. You know that at this time of year, with ten feet of snow on the ground and the thermometer below zero, there are no strawberries."

"Well, by Godfrey, if I can't have what I order I won't pay!"

And the cowboy wouldn't—just walk out and leave Old Beefsteak to clean up the wreck!

Of course, all cowpunchers were not like that, because there were many who were mighty good fellows. Often these shoot-up-the-town chaps are only out for deviltry, and would give a tramp or hobo the shirts off their backs.

But one of these guys turned the trick once too often, and Beefsteak got sore. He got into action, and sent to Virginia City for Jack Harris, the gunman and hired fighter.

Harris's charge was twenty dollars per day when all went quiet, and a hundred dollars per day when there was fighting to do.

Soon Harris was at Elko and installed as a waiter in the restaurant, but only to wait on these would-be bad men. Jack put on an apron, and under it a good, big six-shooter. It would spit out lead with fearful force, or one could use it as a club.

Harris had been on duty only a few days when in came the bad one of the bunch "Shorty Slim," head of the Black Duck

Valley Gang, the one who did the "cock-a-doodle-doing!" Breakfast was over and the place was being cleaned up.

Shorty Slim, who was about six feet tall, sat down. Old Beefsteak gave Harris the nod, so he went up to this fellow and with an assumed feminine voice said:

"What will it be?"

This gave Shorty confidence. Easy! Cinch! Both chuckled inside. Shorty saw a free meal ahead, and Harris saw a hundred dollars

Beefsteak sort of trembled and pictured an awful mix, with the tables tipped over, dishes broken, and the place spattered with gore generally and maybe a new tent to buy. But what cared he when the finish of the tough was in sight? For from then on he would get paid for his food.

"Say, you, sis!" roared the bad man, "give me a porterhouse, do ye hear? None of yer little hungry, consumptive, thin, ragged porterhouses, but one three fingers thick! And, say! Full size; and have it rare, with fried onions.

"Give me fried potatoes, fried bacon, two white-wings, sunny-side up, hot biscuits, corn bread and maple syrup, four hot cakes, and a large cup of coffee—and be quick about it! Say! Give me the Elko *News* to read!"

Jack got the paper, gave it to his customer, and went for the order. In due time he returned and placed everything down in a sort of a bungling way. This gave Shorty more confidence, making him think Jack was afraid. The meal passed quietly, except when, from time to time, a growl would come, "More coffee," which Jack would quickly get. After a good three-quarters of an hour enjoying the meal came

He Gets His Fresh Strawberries.

"Here, waiter, give me a dish of fresh strawberries and fresh cream!"

"All right, sir; they are just in!"

And Jack tripped off to the kitchen. Shorty's eyes followed.

"Gee! have they got 'em?" he seemed to wonder.

In less than a minute back came Jack with a four-quart pan of baked beans, which he placed before Shorty. Then their eyes met, full of fire.

Jack pulled first. Out from under his white apron came his cannonlike old six-shooter. At the same time Jack's left hand had quickly slipped under Shorty's stiff-rimmed white hat and grabbed a handful of heavy hair. Then, with a whack of his gun on the left side of Shorty's head he bellowed in his natural voice, which was like a fog horn going full blast:

Beefsteak Bill Gets Even.

"There's your strawberries. Now eat 'em, and eat 'em all, you fighting sucker!"

Shorty turned white. Jack put the butt of the gun against his stomach, then gave the latter's head a jerk forward that ran his nose against the muzzle of the gun, thus furnishing claret for the meal'

Again came the thundering command:

"Eat 'em all!"

Old Beefsteak Bill had been frozen to the ground, but now he got together some courage. Walking up to Shorty, he looked the bad man straight in the face and said:

"You dog, take that!" And at coupling speed he smashed Shorty between the eyes with his hard clenched fist. Now and then Shorty would groan and say:

"I can't!"

Then Jack would say:

"Eat 'em, you mutt!"

After an hour of poking and tamping down, between long sighs and a plea to "let me go," Shorty had the beans fairly well cleaned up, whereupon Jack said.

"Twenty dollars, sport! Strawberries are expensive in winter!"

With his nose still bleeding, Shorty paid, was led to the tent-door, given a good kick, and told to leave the camp and come no more. Meantime several people gathered about the place and had seen the downfall of the leader. Jack Harris, from the front of the eating-house, then made the announcement that if there were any more fighters or strawberry-eaters in camp he'd like to see 'em! That ended the strawberry festival. Old Beefsteak's place made a hit, and the patronage he got afterward paid him well for his trouble in cleaning out the rough element

From Elko's old-time graveyard it can be seen that it was not always the nice, quiet little town that it has been in the past forty years. She sure was a hot town during the construction of the railroads!

A few months ago I had the pleasure of traveling from San Francisco, California, *via* the old Central Pacific, to Ogden, Utah, and then on to Omaha, Nebraska. It was the first trip over the old road in over forty years, and it was quite a sensation. A real moving-picture passed before my mind's-eye; and ever since there has been a yearning in my heart to tell of some of those old days and the people I knew many years ago. Nearly all the characters who, in different ways, participated in these affairs have long since passed over the summit, but many of them left monuments in the hearts and minds of the people.

I was a fireman on the old Central Pacific in 1875, on what was called the desert, from Wadsworth to Winnemucca, a distance of one hundred and thirty-six miles. A locomotive of that period wouldn't make a tender for a hog of this period. The 'gine I fired then would cough hard at hauling thirty small cars—and there were no air-brakes.

The locomotive would balk at every small hill, and there were many times when the engine balked that all the sand was used up. Then it was a case of cut the train in two and haul half of the drag for ten or fifteen miles to a side-track, after which we'd have to double-back for the other half. Often this would hold a passenger-train for an hour or more, and after getting safely on the side-track the passengers would pass and give us a blessing.

### Looking Back on Forty Years.

Talk of the Central Pacific of forty years ago, and before your mind come the names of Huntington, Hopkins, Crocker, and Stanford—the "Big Four." Those men stand for so much in the railroading of that day!

They were just plain, small merchants in and about Sacramento, Auburn, and San Francisco; young men, full of life and ambition, who, with a combined capital of about fifty thousand dollars, conceived the idea of building a railroad through from the Pacific to join the roads across the Rocky and Sierra Mountains.

This small amount—large in those days—was all consumed in getting concessions through Congress. The undertaking at that time was stupendous, but it was accomplished. And from it grew the Southern Pacific and the railroads north to Portland, with all their branches.

### Senator Stanford's Monument.

Senator Stanford has left a great university as his monument; Crocker, a large banking-house; Huntington and Hopkins, many railroads. Senator Stanford said later, when building the first of the road, that when he could see the Central Pacific own one hundred locomotives he would be happy. But he lived to see the company own that many—and many more.

All the early transportation for the miner of the forty-nine period, and for a few years after, was provided by boat up the Sacramento River from San Francisco, then by freight-wagons and pack-trains into the mountains.

About the years 1856-1857 the Comstock Lode at Virginia City, Nevada, caused great excitement. Gold had been found in the rocks. Up to that time most mining consisted of nuggets found in ravine, river, and creek-beds. The miner, who had been a farmer or laborer, did not know that gold could be found in quartz. Placerville, better known in those days as Hangtown, was a distribution point for the miners near and about, and from there, up through Strawberry Valley, the old emigrant road ran *via* Lake Tohoc, over Kingsberg grade or Kings Cañon road to Carson City and on to Virginia City.

Those were toll-roads; and the toll for a fourteen or sixteen-mule team was from seven to twelve dollars, depending on how many trail wagons were on. The teams formed one string after another. Noses of mules of one team almost touched the trail-wagon of the one ahead.

### Before the Signal Block Came.

From Placerville to Virginia City the roads were sprinkled with teams all night long. The traffic finally got so heavy that

D. O. Mills and Senator William Sharon organized the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, which it was intended to run to Truckee, California.

But the Central Pacific had by this time nearly reached Reno, Nevada, so it was run at first from Carson City to Virginia City, with two trains running daily. The line had all it could do to handle the traffic.

Hank Monk drove the six-horse stage between Carson and the Central Pacific at Reno.

### Operation in the Old Days.

When one sees the block-system now along the railroads to avoid accidents, the sight brings a smile of recollection at the thought of how the superintendent, H. M. Yerington, of the Virginia and Truckee, had to handle trains.

A tower was built near the depot. Yerington would go out every few minutes, climb the tower, and look off toward Empire to see if a train was coming.

Like the Central Pacific, the Comstock also had its Big Four. They were John W. Mackay, James G. Fair, and Messrs. Flood and O'Brien; but of them all John W. Mackay was the one that stood out, as did Senator Stanford in the Central Pacific quartet.

Mackay, like Stanford, never forgot the old-timer. He never made a visit to San Francisco but he would go down the line and inquire after all the old-timers he could think of—ask how they were, what they were doing, and how they were prospering. If he heard that any of his old friends was sick or in hard lines, he would tell his secretary to draw a check in favor of the old fellow. Mackay never forgot a friend.

It was in those days that the foundation money for the Postal Telegraph and Cable lines was made. And how few there are in the world to-day who know that it was John W. Mackay's hard-earned money that made possible a competing line!

Mackay's shrewd business head did it. He dared anything to carry a point. The mining-stock market in the years 1875-1876 was a treacherous old bronco and liable to throw a man at any time.

One day, over the Western Union wires, came a call to Virginia City, Nevada, for Mr. Mackay to go to San Francisco at once, and to be at the stock-broker's office at opening-time the next morning.

Virginia City stood at an elevation of six thousand feet up in the mountains, on a spur of the Sierra Nevadas. It was three hundred miles to Frisco, and there was less than an hour in which to make connections from the Virginia and Truckee Railroad to the Central Pacific at Reno, fifty miles away.

And at that time the Virginia and Truckee was the most crooked road in the world. All the little engine on the job would have to do was to make the run at the rate of a mile a minute.

John Bartholomew, whom I knew well, was one of the daredevil engineers who always "got there."

Just as the start was made it was discovered that the railroad tunnel at the Gold Hill, below Virginia City, was on fire. But John Mackay had to get to Frisco, and Bartholomew was willing to take the risk.

All aboard! The throttle was pulled.

The locomotive arrived at the tunnel, which was like a red-hot furnace inside. Did either of the Johns flinch? Not they! Bartholomew pulled her wide open and made the dash. The train shot through, the little yellow passenger-cars being browned up like a well-baked loaf of bread

Mackay was often thrown from his seat as the train rounded the sharp curves at a sixty-mile rate, but the run was made on time. At Reno the financier caught the Overland to San Francisco, where the frenzied market stocks, whose value to-day is thirty cents per share, were being sold in 1875 for three thousand dollars.

### A Two-Man Railroad.

There were many queer little roads in early days west of the Sierras. Among them was one that ran a few miles between Visalia and Goshen. There was a long car —the front was engine and tender—then baggage and smoking-room, then a partition and a few cushion seats for first-class passengers

If my memory is correct, the conductor was president, baggagemaster, brakeman,

and superintendent. The engineer was master mechanic, roadmaster, and section-boss. But they carried the people, and all were more happy than I because I had to walk the ties in the hot sun, broke!

Railroading, though hard work, at times was fun. I have in mind the picture of us bucking snow through the snowsheds in the Sierras in the early days, when twelve or fourteen locomotives would be coupled together and a snow plow fastened up against the head engine. Two brakemen were on top of the plow, and in front of them was an iron railing. It was their duty to watch for high snowdrifts, then give the "go ahead" signal and get below.

The first engine would toot, and all others follow with their throttles wide open and going some, but only for a short distance, on account of the heavy snow resistance.

Then there would be a balk-up for a couple of miles and another charge at the snow, and maybe, after three or four plunges, a hole would be knocked through.

Those snowsheds would be dense with smoke and cinders. Often snow fell so fast that engines could not back up. Then it was a case of two or three hundred men with shovels getting the crew out.

But the mail had to go through, and for days the crews would be busy as a dog burying a bone on a tin roof. Finally came the rotary plow. Well, you should have seen that cut a hole through a snow-drift!

## THE LOVE-SICK HOGHEAD.

BY LOUIS FITZGERALD.

RUBY and white gleams the semaphore,
Matching her lips and eyes;
Flash of flame from the fire-door—
Heart of me burns likewise.

Air-pump crooning a love song,
Rails going clickety-click,
Everything joins in the ding-dong,
Says to me: "Marry her quick!"

Water's too low for good steaming,
Grade is infernally steep,
Fuel runs short while I'm dreaming,
Tallow-pot thinks I'm asleep.

Highball from Mary would do it;
Drivers would answer to sand,
And Mary—she never would rue it,
I'd lay out a run that would stand.

Headlight is foggy and distant;
Hope to the bell-cord is strong:
If Mary were here on this instant,
I'd whistle: "Off brakes" to my tongue.

Mary, I'd like to run double
With a trim, tidy kettle through life;
Couple up on the hill as a helper,
And sign for the run as my wife!

# FLUGGER McCURL GOES SNITCHING.

BY ROY W. HINDS.

**Convict No. 1347 Kindly Lets the Warden Assist Him in an Interesting Enterprise.**

THE prison shoe-shop was on the second floor of the penitentiary industrial building, which set midway of the great yard that swept toward the side and rear walls from the administration building and cell-houses on the north side. The bench of Convict No. 1347, known in the wide outdoors, which he had not seen in seven years, as "Flugger" McCurl, because of his facility at "flugging" safes and strong boxes, was on the north side of the shoe-shop.

Flugger McCurl had been a model prisoner. With the grim stoicism of the inbred crook, he had set himself to the task of "putting up" his fifteen years as quickly and as easily as possible. He well knew that good conduct would make things that much easier for him, with the added assurance that his good time would be made. The best prisoners usually are the professional lawbreakers. It is the novices who fret while in prison, and, fretting, worry themselves into misdemeanors that make their road much harder. The "real boys" do not fret. They punch out the minutes and the hours as easily as possible.

All of which accounts for the fact that the bench of No. 1347 had been placed at the far end of the shop from that in which stood the guard platform and chair. Seven years of good conduct, with never a whimper over his terrible load, was sufficient to take Flugger from beneath anything but the most cursory surveillance.

The barred window in front of Flugger's bench commanded a view of that part of the yard between the industrial building and the administration building. The summer afternoon was warm. Rippling heat danced from the baked-clay yard and curled into the shop-windows in smothering fluffs.

The long row of convicts bent to their tasks with backs bared to underclothing. Now and then one stopped to mop his face with the coarse State bandanna, looking up with the weight of lagging years yet to go written upon his seamed face. The watchful eye of Guard Mitz, however, kept the toilers from pausing for long.

No 1347 stifled a thrill of quick interest as his glance, raised from the bench for a moment, detected the figure of Warden Cranch walking across the yard. The warden apparently was on one of his casual inspections of the prison, which, of course, would include the industrial building.

Flugger cautiously turned an eye toward the guard platform. Finding Mitz's attention centered elsewhere, he deftly extracted a folded sheet of paper from his shirt-bosom and slid it beneath a strip of leather on the bench. The paper was soiled and considerably creased from a repose of several days in the toiler's clothing. It had been prepared for just such a contingency as Flugger felt was about to develop

In about twenty minutes Warden Cranch entered the shoe-shop. He stood near the doorway for a time surveying the working throng, his eyes roving carelessly up and down the room. Then he went to the guard platform and conversed briefly with Mitz. A slight wave of uneasiness coursed the spine of No. 1347 under a flashing thought that the warden might leave without coming to his end of the shop. Cranch soon dispelled this fear, however, sauntering, as was his invariable custom, down the aisle between the bent backs until he stood near the bench of No. 1347.

As he turned to go back, Warden Cranch felt a paper pressed against his hand and an almost inaudible whisper. Instinctively he clutched the paper and thrust it into a pocket. It was a common thing for prisoners to hand him notes. Sometimes the notes contained appeals for help in getting paroles — sometimes valuable tips on plots among prisoners. Naturally, the warden wouldn't slight a prisoner who sought to give him information. He wasn't passing up any possible chance.

"Important, sir," were the words whispered by No. 1347. "Very important to you, sir."

The warden nodded slightly and passed on up the room. The note and words had been communicated to him without attracting any attention.

An hour later Flugger McCurl sat in the office of Warden Cranch.

"Well?" Cranch demanded. He looked up from Flugger's note and gazed intently at the prisoner, whom he knew to have a long record of good conduct.

"I'd like to talk wit' you alone, sir," McCurl said. He spoke very quietly and respectfully.

"Oh, don't mind him," the warden assured, nodding toward his secretary at a near-by desk. There was a trace of impatience in his words. "Talk away; it's just the same as if we were alone."

"I'm sorry, sir," Flugger protested. His voice was still very quiet and respectful, but there was also an unmistakable firmness in it. "If you'll excuse me, sir, what I got to say is only for you; it mustn't be heard by nobody else. It's very important to you, sir, as you'll see when I've had my say; but—but I can't talk to nobody but you. I hope you understand, sir."

"Oh, well, have it your way," Cranch acceded, nodding dismissal to his secretary.

"You know dat I've been in dis place seven years and better," Flugger said when the door had closed behind the departing secretary. The warden and convict faced each other across a wide desk. Their eyes turned steadily into each other's. Warden Cranch, powerful and burly of build, had no physical fear of the convict, weakened by seven years of undernourishment and confinement. Nevertheless, he followed his invariable rule that *all* convicts would bear watching *all* the time. "Seven years!" Flugger went on. "And dat's a long time, Mr. Cranch. You also know dat I never broke a rule durin' dem seven years—you know dat I been square wit' de management of dis place.

"But what's just as important as all dat is de fac' dat I always been square wit' de pris'ners in here. You knows dat I ain't no snitch, don't you, Mr. Cranch?"

"You've never had that reputation," Cranch conceded. He felt that he was going to get an important piece of information. He knew prisoners well enough to sense immediately that a man who had waited seven years to snitch wasn't going to be a piker. He'd snitch on something worth while.

"No, sir, I ain't never snitched," Flugger went on. There was a trace of emotion in his tone, as though he dreaded the step he was about to take. "I been square wit' ev'ry man in here—pris'ners and guards alike.

"But I been t'inkin' dis t'ing over, Mr. Cranch, and dere's only one way out of it. I made up my mind dat I'm goin' straight when I get out. Dere's no doubt about it. I can be just as good an honest man as I was a crook, as whatever I set my mind to I usually does a good job. Bein' honest is my next job."

"A very commendable resolution, young man," the warden praised, nodding approvingly—not that he cared, but rather to draw the prisoner on. "Very commendable."

"But what's de use of all dese resolutions if I got to stay in prison? It ain't no trouble to be honest in jail, where dere ain't nothin' to steal. De place for a man to reform is outside—and dat's why I'm I'm takin' dis step. I'm doin' fifteen years; countin' good time off, I got six more solid years to stack up—and dat's too long.

"I've t'ought it all over and know dat dere ain't no chance of me gettin' out 'less somebody goes to de front for me. I got to have help.

"I got to sacrifice my own feelin's to get dat help. I'm a man dat never snitched in

my life so you know dis offer is on de square. I ain't one of dose pris'ners who's always carryin' tales about little or nothin'. I got somethin' big.

"Now den, if I tell you how you can nip a scheme dat's bein' engineered to let about a dozen pris'ners out of here, will you go to de front and get a parole or pardon for me?"

Warden Cranch hesitated but a moment in his reply. Warden Cranch purposed to run for Governor at the next election, and he realized in a flash what a campaign boost it would be for him a wholesale delivery plot nipped in the bud. He also realized what a blow it would be to his political fortunes if the plot were successful.

"If you give me information that will break up such plot as that," Cranch answered, "I can pledge my word to you that you'll be a free man inside of thirty days. It won't be difficult to get you out. Your record is excellent, and you've served a long time. If you give me that information, I'll go to the Governor for you as soon as I verify it."

"Dat's good enough for me," Flugger said. "Now, first, I want to warn you dat you mustn't make no quick plays, as you'll scare 'em away, and not nail de ones dat 're in de plot. You might get a few of 'em, but what you want is de whole works—about a dozen of 'em. I only knows a few of 'em myself, but I got a plan where you can catch de whole gang right when dey're makin' de break.

"I never snitched in my life- but here goes!" The Flugger heaved a long sigh, like a man taking a deep breath preparatory to a dash through a strip of fire. "Here goes'

"Dere's a tunnel bein' dug from de back storeroom, under de east cell-house, to de front wall, near de nort'east corner of de prison. Dere ain't no use to get scared about it now." Warden Cranch had started from his chair as he grasped the meaning of the prisoner's revelations—"as dere ain't no chance of dat tunnel bein' outside de wall for a week or more. Dey still got sixty feet to dig, and dey can't possibly make more 'n ten feet a night."

"Who's digging the tunnel?" the warden asked, reassured. "Do you mean to tell me that prisoners can get out of their cells at night to dig tunnels?" He was slightly incredulous.

"Dat's just what I aim to do—give you all de fac's. Den you can see how easy it is when de right men are mixed up in it."

The warden leaned forward, intense interest on his face. Possibly this was the most fortuitous moment in his political career. Maybe he was going to unearth a plot that involved not only prisoners but guards. What a whale of a story this would make for the newspapers! His name would be head-lined all over the State. A great day for his political aspirations.

The convict leaned over the desk, too, speaking in the matter-of-fact tone of truth, like a man who knew what he was talking about and not wasting any words.

"Of course, you know dere's been a bunch of 'vic's sleepin' in de old storeroom," he said. "Since de prison's been so crowded, and while de new cell-house is bein' built, dey're sleepin' on cots down dere. You know all about dat, of course?"

"Certainly, I know that," the warden replied, "but that's in the old storeroom—'way on the other side from the storeroom you say they're tunneling from."

"'Way on the other side is right," conceded the Flugger, "but did you ever stop to t'ink about dat passageway leadin' from de old storeroom, down t'rough de dark cells in de hole and up into de new storeroom?"

"But there's a steel door between the old storeroom and the dark cells—and that can be opened only by a key from the dark-cell side. That key is held by the guards."

"Who's de night guard in de hole?"

"Why, why -I believe Lenier is on that job now."

"Right! And now you know one of the plotters."

"Are you sure about that?"

"I know it," Flugger stated positively. "One of de pris'ners sleepin' in de old storeroom is No 2366, Ed Spade, who was sent up for de Cribben bank-robbery about three years ago. You know, dey never did get de money dat was took out of dat bank, and Spade's got Lenier believin' dat he's got dat money buried, and dat Lenier is

goin' to get ten t'ousand dollars when Spade gets out and digs it up."

"I would have banked on Lenier," Cranch said, although he didn't doubt for a moment that Flugger McCurl had the right information. Bigger men than sixty-dollar-a-month prison guards have been sent wrong by a prospective ten thousand dollars.

"Now, den," Flugger went on, "dey're diggin' out from de new storeroom. On de nort' side of dat room is a big pile of old clo'es—uniforms and shoes dat's been throwed into de discards. Dat pile has been dere for four months—and ev'ry old-time pris'ner in here knows dat de old clo'es here is sold about ev'ry six months. So it's a cinch dere ain't goin' to be anybody messin' wit' dat pile for a couple of months.

"De toolroom, where de road-gang shovels and picks are kep', is just off'n de main storeroom. So you can see how easy it is when de gang is let into de storeroom.

"Dey've pulled out a couple of big rocks from de nort'east corner of de storeroom and 're diggin' straight for de wall. Dey're puttin' de dirt back of that clo'es pile—dere's plenty of room for it, and when dey get done for de night, dey just arrange everything de way it was, set de stones back in de wall and sneak back to de cots in de old storeroom.

"Half de gang works one night and half de nex'. De only chance of findin' de tunnel is for somebody to order de clothing moved, and it ain't likely dat 'll be done for a couple of months. Dere's about a dozen men sleepin' in dat old storeroom, and ev'ry one of 'em, and Lenier, is mixed up in de scheme."

The warden sat silent a few moments, finding it hard to strike immediately upon the most effective plan to snare the whole bunch when they were at their plot. He was immeasurably grateful to the prisoner who had saved him from the odium such a delivery would bring.

"I certainly appreciate this, McCurl," he said finally, "and don't worry about your freedom—I'll have you a pardon in thirty days."

"Dat's kind of you, sir," said the grateful McCurl, "but dere's another t'ing I want to warn you about. De way t'ings stand now, you can't *prove* dat any of dem men is mixed up in dis scheme. You can go down dere and take a look at dat tunnel, but it would be hard for you to prove who dug it. You only got my word to go on—and I'm a convict. I take it you'd like to get de whole bunch, and get 'em dead to rights—ain't dat so?"

"Certainly," replied the warden, "it's one thing to find the tunnel, and another thing to catch the right men in it."

"Dat's it—dat's just it. And it 'll be mighty easy to queer ev'ryt'ing. For instance, one of de men mixed up in it is Dad Watson, who works right down in dat storeroom all day long. He's a sort of guard for de tunnel durin' de day, and keeps any snoopin' 'vic's from runnin' behind dat pile of clothin' by mistake. If you went down dere lookin' for dat tunnel, Dad would spot you, and none of dem plotters would ever go near it again. So dere you'd be, wit' nothin' but an empty tunnel on your hands and no way to prove who dug it.

"I'll tell you what I t'ought would be a good plan to get de whole bunch. I been t'inkin' dis t'ing over for sev'ral days and I've got it figured out to a fine point. You know ev'ry man dat's sleepin' in dat storeroom, and Lenier, is mixed up in de scheme. I don't know dere names, but you can easy get dat from de records. Dey ain't all goin' to be in dat tunnel until de night of de big getaway. What you want to do is catch 'em wit' de goods—catch 'em in dat tunnel.

"Dere's a wing of de old cell-house dat shoots out to just a few feet from where dat tunnel will go under de wall. Now, den, why don't you have a cross-tunnel dug from dat wing, out under de wall. On de night of de big getaway, about a week from now, you can have a bunch of guards down dere in de cross-tunnel. Den dis gang will be diggin' on de final lap of dere own tunnel, when all of a sudden dey break through into de tunnel where de guards is.

"Den you can give 'em a warm reception and nail ev'ry man of 'em just as dey're about to break out. Lenier will be dere, as he'll want to see 'em clear of de walls, and you'll make a cleanin' all in de one

night. I can find out de exact night of de big getaway, and can let you know just when to nail 'em."

"That's a very clever scheme, but involves too much work," the warden responded. "I'll get 'em all right—you just let me know the night they plan on going."

"Very well, Mr. Cranch, I'll do dat; but I t'ought you might want to make t'ings easy for de newspapers," Flugger spoke suggestively; being a good judge of men, he knew the warden liked puffing. "It's only one night's work to dig a tunnel from dat wing of de old cell-house to where it will cross de other tunnel. A couple of guards, good, trusty ones, can do dat wit'out no trouble.

"If you go down dere and nail dat gang in de old way, by just haulin' 'em out of de tunnel, it 'll get about two inches in de newspapers. But if you catch 'em de way I planned, it 'll make a big story - you know what dem reporters like. You'll be de first warden dat ever dug a tunnel to catch a gang of pris'ners at dere own game. I can just see de head-lines, 'Warden Cranch Beats Bold Escaping Convicts at Dere Own Game.' But you know best what to do—I've give you all de dope I got now, and 'll let you know later just when dat gang figures on beatin' it."

"McCurl, you're a very clever young man," Warden Cranch praised, and he really felt admiration for the quick-mindedness of the prisoner. "I don't know but I'll try out your plan - in fact, I know I will. By George, that 'll be a great joke on that gang, won't it? All of 'em digging away like fury, and then, smash! they dig right into the arms of a bunch of guards just as they're nearing liberty! And I'll be in the tunnel myself to help receive them" He chuckled. "A great scheme, McCurl; a great scheme!"

It must have smote the heart of Flugger McCurl with a great loneliness to go about the yard for the next few days, meeting his comrades in misery with the knowledge locked in his own bosom that he had become a snitch, the most ignominious wretch in prison. It is a wonder that he could look them in the face. He was respected by the other prisoners—respected because he had been an artistic crook, and because, as a prisoner, he had kept faith constantly with his kind. There wasn't a speck of yellow in him--that's what they thought. Did he have any qualms of conscience now that he had, as a bargain for his own selfish liberty, blocked the way to freedom for a dozen of his comrades? Did he regret that he had formed an alliance with a rank enemy of his kind?

For Cranch, the warden, the man who should have been a friend of his unfortunate charges, was an enemy of the prisoners. He fed them badly, clothed them even worse, laid down discipline and punishment with a cruel hand, permitted unsanitary conditions to exist within the prison, and thought only of his job as it would affect his personal fortunes. He was disliked by all; hated by many. And Flugger McCurl, an ace among crooks, had allied himself with this man. Flugger McCurl a traitor to his class, and his class the most unfortunate of all men. Did Flugger McCurl regret that he had become a snitch? We shall see

About three days after Flugger had his first interview with Warden Cranch he again sought out that gentleman with the information that the delivery was to be made on the following Monday night, four days hence. The warden was much pleased, and questioned McCurl closely, to make sure he had the correct information. Timeliness was an important part of the counter-plot. McCurl told Cranch the source of his information, and Cranch was satisfied that it was correct.

"I'll have that tunnel dug this very night," the warden confided, in high spirits because of the hit he was to score in the newspapers. "We certainly will put it over on that bunch, won't we?"

On the following Monday morning, at about six o'clock, Warden Cranch was awakened at his home, not far from the prison, by the furious jangling of the telephone-bell. Answering, he recognized the voice of Deputy Warden Mells on the other end of the wire

"There's been a wholesale getaway!" Mells shouted in great excitement. "You better get right over, as things look bad!"

"Confound that fellow McCurl!" the warden muttered to himself as he hastened toward the prison. "He didn't have the right dope, after all. I ought to have had guards stationed in that tunnel every night—I might have known they were liable to change their plans!"

Inside the prison, Warden Cranch rushed down to the new storeroom, where he told himself with faltering heart he would look upon the tunnel which the escapers had dug, and through which they had fled beyond the cross-tunnel he himself had caused to be dug. All was quiet within the storeroom. The warden strode over to the pile of discarded clothing and furiously pulled it down, scattering it about. Nothing but a bare wall faced him. The rocks, as solid as Gibraltar, gazed upon him imperturbably. He wheeled about and faced the aged convict, Dad Watson, who as custodian of this room was just assuming his duties for the day, but who Cranch had expected was now well on his flight.

"Didn't you go with 'em?" Cranch demanded fiercely.

"No, sir; I didn't go, sir," Dad Watson replied, humble and mystified. "Are you looking for Mr. Mells, sir? I expect he's over in the old cell-house wing, sir; there's been a big escape, sir!"

Light was seeping into the befuddled senses of Warden Cranch, and he rushed out of the storeroom. Down a passageway he went toward the wing from which his own tunnel had been dug. On the way he saw a file of convicts marching through the underground passage toward the toolroom to get their tools for the day's work.

At the head of the file was Convict No. 2366, Edward Spade, whom Cranch had believed to be the ringleader of the plot.

With sinking heart, Cranch joined the group of officials at the entrance of the tunnel—the tunnel of his own planning!

"It looks bad, sir," Deputy Mells said to the warden, drawing him to one side "But I've sent fifty telegrams out now and have guards scouring the woods. They've got a big start, though; and it looks bad

"A dozen of 'em gone, sir; all the men who slept in the old hospital back of this wing. They knocked Reynolds down and got the key to the wing—knocked him out as he was making the rounds, and then bucked and gagged him. But I can't understand how they dug this tunnel—I can't understand it. About a dozen of 'em, sir; Jip Cochran, Packey Woods, Flugger McCurl—"

"Is McCurl among 'em?" Warden Cranch asked in a weak voice.

"Yes, indeed!" Mells answered. "McCurl's gone; and Reynolds told me McCurl seemed to be the ringleader—he was leadin' 'em when they rushed him!"

## AN ARAB PROVERB.

THE man who knows not that he knows not aught—
He is a fool; no light shall ever reach him.
Who knows he knows not, and would fain be taught—
He is but simple; take thou him and teach him.

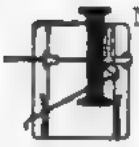
But whoso, knowing, knows not that he knows—
He is asleep; go thou to him and wake him.
The truly wise both knows and knows he knows—
Cleave thou to him, and nevermore forsake him.

# HOW YOUR BAGGAGE TRAVELS.

## The Safe, Convenient Transportation of the Traveler's Luggage an Important Branch of Modern Railroading.

BY J. E. QUICK,

Retired General-Baggage Agent of the Grand Trunk Railway System.



N the early days of the railway the needs of travelers partook of that simplicity which characterized the life of the period, and very few belongings were carried on a journey by the average person. Baggage problems therefore gave very little anxiety to railway officials. There was so little baggage that it practically took care of itself.

From being a very minor branch of railway-service, the transportation of baggage has steadily increased in importance until, to-day, the baggage-departments give well-nigh perfect service, and play an important part in the modern transportation business.

The first records of forwarding baggage show that no checks were used, each piece of baggage being marked with chalk, showing the name or number of the station the baggage was destined for. The baggage was then thrown into a baggage-car in charge of conductor or brakeman, and, if not overlooked or overcarried, was put off at its proper destination, but no record whatever was kept of the transportation.

If baggage went astray it was traced as well as possible by letter, or, if very important or valuable, a man was sent out to search for it.

### First Checks Were on G. T. R

The first authentic record of baggage-checks being used was by the Grand Trunk Railway Company, of Canada, on January 1, 1857, sixty-one years ago. The first checks used were lead ones, evidently manufactured in the railway shops. They bore the initials "G. T. R.," with a number stamped below. There was nothing to distinguish the duplicate, or passenger's, portion of the check from the portion attached to the trunk or valise.

This style of check was followed by a neat brass check, on which the strap-check was distinguished from the duplicate by a star, which reduced the chances of fraudulent claims. The station of destination was designated by a small tag hung over the strap portion of the brass check.

### Joint Checking System.

Baggage was only checked to points on the line of origin, and passengers were obliged to recheck their baggage at junction or transfer points.

As the volume of business increased there was a demand for through checking to the principal cities, and there was then designed and put in use a reversible destination check, reading between two destination points. For example: "Chicago to New York," which, by reversing, would read: "New York to Chicago."

It was necessary to provide a supply of these for all the different lines, or routes, which made several issues between two given points necessary. To take care of smaller stations a joint reversible check was introduced, reading between two designated lines.

For example, there would be a joint check between "Boston and Albany Railroad" and "Union Pacific Railroad," which, by reversing, could be issued in either direction.

A very large number of checks was required to be kept in stock, and a large

proportion lay idle, becoming rusty or corroded, and the straps became rotten, thus making their use unsafe.

An idea of the large number required to be kept in stock can be gained from the fact that when I began duty as general baggage agent of the Grand Trunk lines in Canada and the United States, in 1896, I gathered up and turned into the Stores Department nearly six tons of old brass, worth at that time about one thousand five hundred dollars. The leather straps from these checks were useless and had to be destroyed.

### Modern Checking Methods.

The joint reversible checks were followed by a so-called "special check," being a brass plate, or holder, bearing the name of the issuing line and carrying a cardboard check somewhat similar to the present form of card-check.

There was, at first, some objection to these checks owing to the apparent danger of the card-check being torn or lost from the holder, while the burden of sorting and returning each line's stock of holders became very great.

It was about the time of the introduction of this form of check that the National Association of General Baggage Agents was formed at Louisville, Kentucky, in 1882, and the vote of members present showed that only about fifty per cent were in favor of its use, but all the railways afterward became converted to the idea, and in a very few years this special check was adopted universally.

A great deal has been done to protect the interests of the transportation lines as well as those of their patrons in the matter of lost baggage. No class of claims connected with the traffic of a great railway are more vexatious to deal with than those arising from the damage to or loss of baggage.

### More and Better Baggage.

It is not the policy of the railway companies to repudiate honest and legitimate claims where an actual loss has been suffered, but it is surprising to note how pliable the consciences of some people become when they think they have a claim against a railway company and assume that the only basis of settlement must be their own statement of what their trunk or valise contained.

In case of freight or express shipments there is usually an invoice of goods showing quality and value which is of great service when adjustments are being made for loss or damage, but in baggage claims these methods are not available and settlements must be made on other lines.

The value of baggage carried has increased wonderfully, as has the class of baggage presented for transportation, and the style of receptacles in which it is transported has also changed very greatly. One who has observed travel in all its phases for the last quarter of a century cannot help but observe the improved quality of the baggage now used

### Size of Trunks Limited.

The quality and quantity of baggage carried by the average passenger is a sure indication of the general prosperity of the people. It is but a few years since the average passenger carried but one trunk, many of them contenting themselves with the old-fashioned satchel or hamper, whereas now the average tourist requires from one to a dozen receptacles, consisting of wardrobe trunks, dress-trunks, hat-trunks and boxes, suit-cases, dog-valises, golf bags, *et cetera*, for the transportation of his belongings, and in some instances the trunks and valises of a single passenger are valued at several hundred dollars, exclusive of contents.

Much advancement has been made toward keeping within reasonable limits the size of trunks and receptacles offered for transportation. Until 1910 there were no size restrictions, and wardrobe and sample trunks were being manufactured and used of such large size that they could hardly be taken in at baggage-car doors.

It took long-continued efforts to get the transportation rule restricting the size of containers established, but to-day it is firmly grounded and adhered to.

There was also some difficulty in enforcing the rule regarding the two hundred and fifty pounds maximum weight of any

piece of baggage, but that is now a standard maintained by all transportation lines.

In 1905 procedure was adopted regarding limiting of railways' liability on baggage, which was approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

### Dogs are Excess Baggage.

In 1907 there was laid the foundation of what is now the universal and uniform charge for transportation of dogs. Heretofore it had been the practise to transport dogs in baggage-cars free of charge and without checking, the owner placing the animals in the care of the train baggagemen, to whom he usually gave a tip.

It was necessary for the owner to repeat this operation at every transfer point. This was found very unsatisfactory and led to many complaints from passengers. A study of the question showed that the passenger would not pay much—if any—more, on a long journey, if a regular charge for transportation of dogs was made than under the system of giving numerous tips, while the railway company would get the revenue and obviate complaints

So the system of transporting dogs under an excess or dog-check, which has resulted in a large increase in baggage-car earnings and better service to travelers, was instituted.

The Baggage Department, having but a limited opportunity to earn direct revenue, its officers are naturally desirous of protecting the revenue which does come to it, consisting principally of excess baggage collections, but the attainment of this aim has always been beset with many obstacles.

### Weight Limit on Baggage.

One of these has been the persistent attempts of some passengers to secure an increased allowance of free baggage. Other difficulties in the way of devising an absolute check on excess collections are the extraordinary movement of baggage on special occasions, want of proper time for weighing, ingenious devices to avoid payment of charges, *et cetera*.

It is a matter for congratulation that in some of the particulars above alluded to a marked improvement has been secured. By common consent one hundred and fifty pounds per ticket is now accepted as the limit of the free allowance on baggage.

One of the forward steps in the development of the baggage department was the agreement between the railroads relative to the method of dealing with settlement of concealed losses, which has resulted very satisfactorily and avoided many disputes. What is especially referred to under the heading of "Concealed Losses" is stealing from baggage in transit over one or more lines.

### "Concealed Losses."

As an example, a trunk checked from New York to San Francisco, on being delivered to the residence of the owner, is discovered to have been opened *en route*, either by picking or breaking the lock, and some of the contents abstracted

This is reported to the terminal line, which makes an investigation to convince itself as to the justice of the claim. Investigation is then started as to where the loss occurred.

If the records of all lines over which the baggage passed show it to have been in apparent good order, and the legal department of the terminal line decides that the claim is a just one, the terminal line then adjusts the claim and charges each line over which the baggage passed with its proportion of the damage on basis of ticket earnings.

A great betterment of service has taken place in connection with the transportation of corpses, with better protection to our employees and the saving of much annoyance to the friends and relatives of the deceased

### Transportation of the Dead.

Prior to the taking up of this question there had been no sanitary restrictions whatever in connection with transportation of dead bodies. They were not embalmed, and were forwarded in ordinary wooden coffins and not in metallic-sealed caskets, as at present.

It became absolutely necessary for the railroad companies to agitate the subject for the protection of the health of their

employees. There were several conferences between committees of the American Association of General Baggage Agents, various Health Officers' Associations, and the National Funeral Directors' Association, resulting, after many meetings and several years of hard work, in the very efficient and absolutely sanitary method by which bodies are now handled.

### Caskets Checked to Destination.

Formerly it was necessary for the escort to personally attend to the handling and transferring at junction points, but it is now the universal custom to check caskets containing the remains through to the destination, avoiding the necessity of the friends in charge having anxiety regarding proper transfer

In the United States there are licensed embalmers, and no body can be transported except upon certificate that the body has been embalmed in accordance with health regulations by a licensed embalmer. There has been an agitation in Canada to obtain legislation on the same lines, but so far without success.

I am inclined to doubt the statement regarding men being better able to pack trunks than the ladies, especially in view of a claim which was made against a transportation line for seven hundred and fifty dollars for goods contained in a trunk which had been lost in transit.

When asked on the witness-stand for a list of the contents of trunk, the lady stated that it contained these articles.

### A Few Trifles in a Lady's Trunk.

Seventeen dresses, fifteen shirts, ten pairs of boots, six bathing suits, a coat, ten lace curtains, three suits underwear, a lot of stockings and shirts, one waist, two extra tablecloths, two lots of napkins and doilies, five bedspreads, four blankets, a bunch of towels, eight bed-sheets, ten pillow cases, three pairs of men's trousers, one lot of men's underwear, collars, ties, vest and socks, five sweaters, four night-shirts, two corsets, two pairs eye-glasses, one pair opera-glasses, one dozen knives and forks, one dozen dessert-spoons, eight steel knives and forks, twelve common spoons, two wool rugs, a mirror and toilet articles, and—that was all!

After deliberating an hour the jury granted the plaintiff three hundred dollars damages. The trunk measured 42 x 20 x 30 inches.

Any lady who could succeed in getting the above list of articles into a trunk of those dimensions would surely be an adept at packing baggage.

Another case which came under my observation was a lady making claim for a loss of suit-case and contents. This lady gave a list that appeared to the railway attorney as being out of all proportion to the size of the container, and to prove this contention there was obtained a stock of duplicate articles, such as those named in the list, and a suit-case of the dimensions claimed

The lady succeeded in placing all the articles in the suit-case in good order, although the attorney for the railroad failed to get more than half of the articles into the suit case.

### Careless Baggageman.

There are often queer articles packed in trunks and other containers presented for checking.

A New England lady, arriving at a station, found a perturbed baggageman endeavoring to handle a trunk which was smeared all over with a mysterious sticky fluid, which was oozing from the crevices.

"That is my trunk," she said to the man. "What ails it?"

"What have you got in it?" asked the baggage man.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "You careless man, you have gone and upset my trunk and spilled that jar of maple sirup I was bringing down to Aunt Martha!"

Only the supreme confidence in the baggageman could have influenced the dear lady to believe that a jar of sirup, without a lid, packed in the center of a trunk, would travel from Vermont to New York without ever being once turned over.

### "We Strive to Please."

Our station baggagemen are very obliging Several years ago two men came to the baggage-room at Lansing, Michigan, carrying an ordinary trunk between them, and requested that the trunk be checked to

Port Huron, Michigan. The baggageman made out a check and attached it to the trunk, handing the duplicate check to one of the men. The other man said: "Where is my check?" and the baggageman replied. "Where is your baggage?" The traveler stated that he was part owner of that trunk, and the baggageman thereupon made out another check, attached it to the other end of the trunk, and gave the duplicate to the second passenger!

### The American Association.

In conclusion, a brief mention should be made of the important work accomplished by the American Association of General Baggage Agents in the evolution of the baggage system

As before stated, it was customary in earlier days to regard the baggage service as something which could take care of itself, and needed no special attention. It had no distinct department with its own officials and employees, giving it their attention.

But with the coming of the era of railroad expansion and with the consolidation of smaller lines into great systems, the baggage system became of sufficient importance and extent to necessitate special departments for its conduct, with general baggage agents in charge

With the increase in the number of these departments all questions pertaining to their work naturally received more study and attention, and the work of systematizing, regulating, and improving received a distinct impetus. If the present development of baggage-transportation could have been foreseen, the whole system might have been organized on a different basis, which would have recognized the transportation of the passenger and his baggage as two distinct things, and imposed charges for the service accordingly.

### First Baggage Agents' Convention, 1866.

Owing to the absence of records on the subject it is difficult to trace with any exactness the history of the first baggage departments created. There is in existence one copy of a report of a National Baggage Agents' Convention, held in New York in 1866, and it is known that another convention was held in Chicago in the following year

No person recorded as a member of the association which organized these conventions is alive to-day, and it is probable that the association could not have existed long after the 1867 meeting

There was no recorded gathering of heads of baggage departments until 1881, when a few general baggage agents of the Eastern United States lines met at Kansas City. This Kansas City meeting was so beneficial in many ways, especially in the protection of and increasing of revenue, that it was agreed that a meeting on a larger scale and in an organized form would, if properly conducted, facilitate the transaction of baggage business and result in benefit to the service.

### National Association Formed.

Accordingly a call was issued for a meeting to be held at Louisville, Kentucky, on February 22, 1881, and there the "National Association of General Baggage Agents" was organized, Mr. F. J. McWade, lately retired from service of the Pennsylvania road under their pension system, being elected president.

There were forty-three charter members enrolled at that meeting, three of whom are still in the association. They are Mr. F. Walsh, General Baggage Agent, A. T. and S. F. Ry.; Mr. H. P. Deering, General Baggage Agent, Michigan Central Railway, and the writer.

The exchange of ideas and experiences gradually worked toward uniformity, until to-day all lines in the United States and Canada have identical systems. By constant efforts and much thought and study a complete piece of machinery has been created that is working very smoothly, and it is up to our successors to keep it well oiled and looked after.

# THE BEEFERS ON THE NIGHT RUN.

BY J. W. EARP.

**To the Average Railroader Words Are but Safety Valves by Which He Lets Off Surplus Pressure.**

WHAT'S the use of paying out ten cents to see a few thousand feet of celluloid flashed upon a screen in some theater if you chance to live on or near a railroad where every freight-car is a scene, every freight-train a play, and every worker an actor in life's drama?

What's the use of paying out a quarter to see a vaudeville show when you can be paid two dollars and seventy-eight cents for listening to conversation that skins anything vaudeville can ever hope to offer?

What's the use of sighing for some new railroad stuff when you can go down to the roundhouse, car-repairer's shack, rip-track, yard-office, snake's shanty, or any other place where railroaders work and get enough comedy to last you the balance of your born days?

Echo answers, "What's the use?"

It is the time of year when biz is extra heavy. The men are putting in from fourteen to sixteen hours a day every time they stick their noses out of a terminal, and to make matters worse, the order has gone out from headquarters that no one shall be permitted to lay off unless threatened with immediate death or already dead.

The men spend their time fighting drags up and down the road, grabbing a bite to eat here and there, rushing home to snatch a few hours' sleep, and then kissing the wife good-by and going some more. Their children, if they have any, are not sure whether they have a papa or not papa is getting to be as near a myth as Santa Claus.

The first scene is at the yard-office. The yardmaster is up to his eyes in work, and the call-boy is concentrating all the energy of his optics in deciphering the fine print which chronicles the adventures of one "Dead-Eye Dick."

In his mouth his corn-cob pipe, unlighted, wabbles from side to side as *Dick* gets into trouble and then gets out again with an ease seldom found outside novels. The yardmaster takes down the phone, talks for a moment to an invisible party, then says to the call-boy:

"Billy."

"Uh-uh."

"Extra east for ten o'clock. Who's first out?"

The call-boy, looking at his book, reads off:

"Grady, Cronin, and Donnely for the train-crew; and Bill White and Jess Smith for the engine crew. I was just over to the roundhouse a few minutes ago, and I looked to see."

"Humph!" grunts the yardmaster. "Some crew! Chase yourself now, kid, and get them out the hay. The beefers will all be tuned up to-night, and we will have music around here until they leave town."

The call-boy slides out into the night. The next scene is at the door of Conductor Bill Grady's home

. The call-boy notifies the conductor of the extra east. In no uncertain language Bill gives his opinions of call-boys in general and winds up with a harangue which, if it could be placed on the speaking stage, would make his everlasting fortune.

The call-boy, old hear at the game and familiar with just such scenes, merely shrugs his shoulders, draws on the corn-cob

with a little more energy than he formerly used and thrusts the book into Bill's hands to be signed

Dissolve into a fade-out and show scene three, where the call-boy is in Cronin's room, and diligently prodding the sleeping Cronin in the back with his lead-pencil.

"What d'ye want?" asks the still sleepy-eyed man

"Extra east at ten bells"

"What we getting?"

"Duke's mixture. What did you think it would be, a caboose bounce?" the call-boy replies rather sarcastically.

"Caboose bounce!" snorts Cronin. "Say, if that was humor you'd be a miniature Klondike. Caboose bounce—heck! It's been so long since I saw a caboose bounce on this division that I'd think I was due to take the gold cure if I was ever to meet up with one of them things.

"If the G. M. was to ever see a C. B. he'd die of heart-failure and have the chief despatcher fired for conniving to defraud the poor widows and orphans out of their twenty per cent dividends. A caboose Oh, jumping horses, Mary Ann! Fade, you imp of Satan, or I'll bend the wash-basin over your peanut dome!"

Ditto the same scenes with the calling of Brakeman Donnely, the engineer and fireman, and you have a pretty good start on the play. Then back to scene one

Grady enters the yard-office. A scowl is on his face, and his mood is warlike. Everybody lays low for the inevitable storm

"It's funny that you fellows can violate every article in the schedule and get away with it. If I understand our contract, we are to be the judge of how much rest we need

"I came in at one thirty this P.M. and signed up for twelve hours undisturbed rest. And this lacks a blankety-blank lot of being twelve hours here at only nine ten now. You guys have run it over me about enough, and I'm getting pretty tired of it."

"Well, well," said the yardmaster in his most placating voice, "we evidently overlooked it on the rest sheet. I'll see that it doesn't occur again."

Now, Bill knows he never signed up for the rest; so does the yardmaster. Nevertheless, he leaves with a parting shot:

"That overlooking stunt is the best thing you do. How much of a train did you say we were getting?"

"Two thousand tons—sixty cars"

"Is that all? Why didn't you have us clean out the yard and be done with it?

"Don't suppose you figure on running another train for a month, do you?"

Nobody answers, and Bill leaves—growling. Enter the rear brakeman, George Donnely, who offers up the following invocation

"I don't see why I can't have an hour-and-thirty-minute call like the rest of the boys do. The best I ever do is to get an hour, and a pretty short one at that.

"The next time they slip a short call to me, the train is going to be late the difference between what I got and what I should have got. Get me?"

Exit George

Our next scene is the roundhouse office. Enter engineer Bill White and Jess Smith, fireman. Bill speaks

"What engine we goin' to get, sport?"

"No. 2127," says the boy.

"What! That old battle-ax?" from the fireman. "Say, that old mill hasn't been cleaned since they first brought her out of the shops. If you think I'm going to be a feeding that old scrap-heap crude oil all night long, you've got another guess coming. Call another man."

"Ain't got any," the boy informs him.

"Well, get one. I'm done breaking my back trying to keep them old cook-stoves hot just to please a bunch of hams who are too lazy to do a little work on them."

"Suit yourself about that, Jess. The engine is O. K.'d by the foreman, and she'll have to go."

The fireman turns to his engineer.

"What do you think about such work as that, Bill? Are we going to stand for any such playing of favorites around here? I'll bet Tommy Cunning got a good engine to take out." Turning to the engine despatcher.

"What engine did Tommy get?"

"No. 1990."

"See there, Bill! The best one in the

shop. But us, we take anything they want to give us. Can you beat it? We never will get anywhere with the mill we're getting."

"We should worry, Jess. For myself, I don't care what kind we get, so long's she's got a Johnson bar and a throttle on her But we'll tell 'em one thing right now: we're not going to kill ourselves making time to-night."

Now the scene shifts to the caboose. Brakeman Donnely enters the caboose with a large basket on his arm. The conductor is pulling on a pair of overalls, but looks up as George enters and growls:

"By grab! You must think you've got a banker's job, coming down here at thirty minutes to leaving-time. If you're going to work on this car with me, you've got to do better than this. If you can't, why, get off the car."

"Is that so? Well, old socks, our contract says I don't have to show up here until thirty minutes of leaving-time; and I'm living up to it. See?"

"You needn't get hard-boiled about it, or I'll just write you up to the trainmaster."

"Crack your whip, kid; crack your whip! I've worked for a dozen roads before I ever saw this pike, and I expect to work for a dozen more before I shuffle off. You can push the pencil any time you feel like it, far as I'm concerned."

Grady grunts and eyes the big basket.

"What you got in the basket?"

"Lunch," snaps George

"Lunch!" yells Grady. "You must be figuring on a famine. There's enough grub there to feed an army."

"Well, I'm the only army that's going to feed out of it. I'm cutting down expenses."

Yard office. Grady enters and addresses the operator.

"Tell the gink in the office we're ready. Here, you," to the bill clerk, "let's get busy with these bills. Ready? O. K.—C. and A. 16434, B and O. 80174, T. P."

"Say, the despatcher wants to know how much time you'll want to go to Strafe for No. 17?" came from the operator.

"Forty-five minutes. That T. P. car's number was 7668. Where's your ears? R. I. 87665—"

"Despatcher says he can't give you that much time, Bill."

"That's his funeral, not mine. I'm paid fifty-two cents an hour for staying here. A. T. S. F. 56702, ditto 17777 four sevens is a good hand in box-car poker. S. P."

"Despatcher says you ought to go over there in thirty minutes," announces the operator. "How about it?"

"You tell that white-collared, bench-warming son of a cook I know how much time I need. I've got sixty cars—and the Lord only knows how many tons, you tell him!"

"He says for you to quit laying down on the job, and to try and act like a man."

"M. K. T. 10001. What! You tell that four-eyed gent with the perfumed hair Yes, where to? Ore, did you say, kid?—that I'm the brains on this train, and I know how much time I need. Now, listen, kid, I gave you the last one, and you said a car of ore.

"You can't find the bill? Ain't that just like a clerk? If I ran my biz like you guys do yours, I'd put this road in the hands of the 'receive me dear committee' in no time. Naw, I won't go on! You find the bill or we'll stay here all night."

"He wants to know if you'll be ready to leave on the call?" says the poor operator.

"Sure, if this guy finds the bills in time. Found them? Good!"

Next scene: Bill handing up the orders to the engineer, who says:

"How many tons we got, Bill?"

"Three thousand. Not counting Donnely's lunch-basket."

The engineer takes his seat, looks at the steam-gage and opens the throttle gently. The brakeman throws the outside switch and high-balls. They are off.

Cronin catches on some fourteen cars back of the engine and watched for a high-ball from the rear. Finally a lantern twinkles from the rear. He answers it with his lantern and the engineer answers with the whistles.

Cronin seats himself on the edge of the car and lets his feet dangle in space. From the expression on his face, he is looking at life through a pair of smoked glasses.

They stop at Clyde for water. Donnely

goes back to flag; Grady comes up alongside the train and meets Cronin. The conversation runs like this

"Where were you when we were pulling out of Strafe?"

"On top," answers Cronin.

"Of what? I didn't see your lantern."

"You didn't! Well, you must be blind We'll have to send you to the doctor to have your eyes examined."

"Is that so? Now, you needn't get smart with me. I'm wise to you guys. You were getting a little shut-eye, that's what you were doing. I want you to understand right now, no sleeping goes while you're with me."

"Aw, Bill, your imagination is hurting you, that's all!"

"Imagination!" yells Grady. "I'm the conductor on this train, and I don't want any back talk."

"You can be the whole crew if you want to," declared Cronin. "I know my business as well as you do."

And Cronin leaves Bill fuming.

The engineer finishes taking water and calls in a flag. At the next station the order board is red. Grady is in a stew when he gets over to the station.

"What's the matter with that hello skirt, now?" he inquires of the operator. "Can't he let one of these drags alone? Suppose he thinks it's a cinch to start and stop one of these big trains. What you got?"

"No. 31 to meet an extra at Sweet," replies the operator.

"Wouldn't that put a crimp in your eyebrow! If I had a kid who couldn't do a better job despatching than some of these ginks over here, I'd shoot him and put him out of his misery. Don't suppose he knew that extra was on the road until after we left Cuba?"

"I'm sure, William, I could not say."

"Waugh, waugh—er—humph!" Grady spouted. "You don't know you're alive But what else can you expect from a sixty-a-month ham?"

"Gwan, you old fat-head, you make me tired. Sign up here so I can complete her."

Grady takes his orders and goes over toward the engine. Five cars back of the engine he meets Cronin crawling under the cars from the opposite side

"What 'd we get on the board, Bill?" asked Cronin

"Fine time to ask, isn't it? Why didn't you come down to the office and find out, so as to save me a trip over here? No, sir, all you guys think about is getting out of doing a little work."

"Nothing of the kind," Cronin denied. "I was taking down a brake beam."

"Taking down a brake beam! It sure is remarkable how you shacks can find things like that so close to the engine to do when there is a prospect of a good walk ahead of you. The next time you see a red board, you come down to the office and get the orders and bring them over to the engineer."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. You O. R. C.'s are paid to sign for and deliver the orders to the engineer. The rule-book says—"

Grady consigned the rule-book to a climate which is always more or less supposed to be torrid, then added:

"I suppose Donnely is called in already, in his mind. If he's hanging around the caboose instead of being out in the country flagging, I'll sure eat on him

"They'll spring a test some night and fire the bunch of us. These boys sure do hate to get very far away from the crummy."

Grady hands the orders up to the engineer.

"Call in the flag, White," he orders, and White does so

It is quite a spell before a signal comes from the rear. When Grady swings on the caboose, he immediately starts in on George.

"By grab! What on earth were you so long about coming in for? I thought you'd gone back to Strafe."

"I came as quick as I could"

"As quick as you could! Well, all I've got to say is that you sure are some speedy guy. Why, my poor old father, just turning eighty-three, could make twice as good time as you did.

"After this, young man, you want to throw your feet out if you expect to brake for me Get a little pep in you; get pep!"

On the engine Cronin seats himself across from the engineer and says:

"What were the orders, Bill?"

"Why didn't you read 'em when you had the chance?" retorts the engineer.

"Didn't want to, toughy!"

"Then don't want to now," Bill snarls.

Cronin turns to the fireman

"Isn't he the cheerful gazabo, Jess? Sociability just fairly oozes out of him—nit!"

"We're heading in here for an extra," butts in Bill. "Shake a leg for the switch now. Hurry!"

They head in. Cronin drops back to look the train over, and finds two cars that will have to be brassed. Three hours slip by before they are ready to move again.

The coal is getting beyond the fireman's reach. Cronin scours the train for a hobo without finding one, and it is with very bad grace that he returns to the engine, takes up the shovel and spades down the coal to the sweating fireman.

In a short time he is perspiring freely and this does not add to his temper.

At a stop for a railroad crossing one of the Knights of the Itching Feet Lodge boards the train. Cronin found him when he dropped back to bleed a car that was sticking, and the K. I. F. was hustled over to earn his ride by the judicious exercising of the shovel

Evidently spading down coal did not appeal to the fastidious tastes of this knight, because the next time the train stopped the hobo took French leave of his job. There is hatred in Cronin's heart for Hoboland and all of its inhabitants, as he once more bent his back over the scoop shovel and passed the coal down to the waiting fireboy.

There is a shortage of coal at Elgin, a subdivision. Cronin groans in deepest agony when the news is announced. He groans more when the yardmaster informs him they are picking up twenty empties. But he fairly yells when the yardmaster says:

"You will probably have to make a switch to get them, because they are buried—somewhere in on seventeen."

"Where are the snakes?" Cronin snorts.

"On the rip."

"On the spot, you mean."

"Have it your own way. Here's the list." And he hands it over to Cronin

"This is one place where the snakes never work," Cronin laments to George, who has just arrived on the scene. "Their motto is, 'Sixteen years a switchman and never threw a switch.'"

"Why don't you fire the snakes and let the road men do the work around here?" asks George. "I've been on this pike for a long while, and I've my first time to see them exercising the goat. I'm of the opinion that they're the original kid-gloved boys. They could wear white gloves all day and never get them dirty."

"No doubt," the yardmaster responds wearily, and turns his back on the two men.

The two brakemen are busy switching out cars when Grady comes bustling up to the engine all ready to leave town.

"For the love of Cæsar!" he bawls. "Haven't you guys got that pickup made yet?"

"Long ago," sarcastically from George, "but we are now switching out this place so as to save the snakes the trouble."

"I'll have you understand—" Grady began, when George stepped in front of him and said:

"Shut up, or I'll lambast you over the noodle with the bug. I've taken all off you I'm going to. Get me? From now on you sit still and look on, if you don't want to work."

"This is insubordination!" gasps Grady weakly.

"It 'll be murder if you pop off much more," George snaps. He waves his lantern viciously, and the train's pickup moved forward, out to the main line and back onto the train.

Cronin is just getting up a good sweat in the tender when an air-hose blows up and pulls a lung. He goes back to the caboose and helps Grady lug a chain to the scene of disaster. Both are too exhausted to pass comments and the work progresses except for an occasional expletive from Grady.

But this is a blessing in disguise, inasmuch as they pick up another wanderer of the ties. The motion is made and carried,

without a dissenting voice, that said hobo is to pass down coal to the fireman.

To avoid a repetition of desertion, as in the case of their former helper, Cronin sits watch over the drafted man

Extra No. 2127 smokes on short time against the fast limited in trying to make Wondron. Everybody is on his toes and Cronin is on the pilot when Bill pinches them down while Cronin makes a desperate dash and bends the rails almost under the front pony-trucks of the engine. They clear the limited by thirty seconds and the engineer is so relieved he casts his grouch to the winds

"Good work, Cronin, old man. You're the speediest thing on the division"

"Humph," grunted Cronin. Nevertheless, he was pleased at the obvious compliment.

The tension is broken. Cronin seats himself on the seat-box and thoughtfully rolls a cigarette. White leans out of the cab window and watches the play of the headlight on the rails.

The fireboy plies his handkerchief and shovel vigorously, and hums beneath his breath. Back in the caboose Donnely is wide-eyed and vigilant, while Grady nods drowsily to the thrum of the wheels beneath him.

A streak of gray in the east heralds the approach of coming daylight. George looks at his conductor nodding, notices the many streaks of gray in the once black hair, and a wave of shame sweeps over him.

"Wish I hadn't shot off my mouth to him last night," murmured George regretfully. "It makes me feel small. Guess I'll have to get the old stiff some ice so he can have ice-water when we get in"

The sun is high in the heavens when George thrusts a foot in Grady's ribs and stirs him to wakefulness. With many a groan, Grady stretches his cramped limbs and hastens to wind up his clerical work

George drops down out of the cupola and starts making the beds down, all the while humming a song.

The train glides into the yards and comes to a stop. Their work is done. Grady goes to the yard-office.

When he returns he finds both men in bed. George looks up as Grady enters.

"How many times out are we, Bill?" he asks.

"Three. We stand for the hot-shot tonight. How's that?"

"Fine. Hear that, Cronin?"

"Uh uh. Suits me."

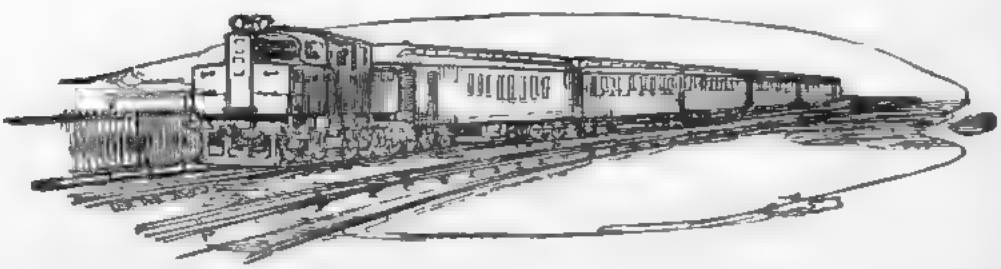
"Wish I had a good, cold drink of water," Grady sighs as he tosses a shoe under his bunk. "Gee, but I'm tired and thirsty!"

"Water in the cooler," says Cronin "George got it after we got in."

"Guess I haven't got the two best brakemen on the pike," muttered Grady, as he drank deeply and contentedly of the cold water. "I sure have."

And at that very moment Engineer White is insisting on being allowed to pay for the fireman's and the hobo's breakfasts. He also passes an invitation to the fireman to take in a show if they have time that afternoon.

So what's the use of paymg ten cents to see a few feet of reel life, when you can get paid for seeing real life? The bark of the average railroader is worse than his bite And words to him are but the safety-valves by which he lets off surplus pressure.



# WHERE FOOLS RUSH IN.

BY BARCLAY NORTHCOTE.

Author of "The Wraith on the Wire," "Captain of His Soul," "The Dividends of Decorum," "Kid Mothball," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE.

## CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS ERRAND

"SAN PABLO! S a-n P a-b-l-o!" announced the trainman as the locomotive screeched the usual station signal; whereupon a smooth-faced young man attired in a dark, neat sack suit arose in his seat, folding a newspaper which he had been reading before clapping his hat on a thatch of hair, the hue of freshly threshed wheat straw, and sauntering to the door of the day coach when the service application of the air brought the Del Monte Limited smartly up alongside a platform.

"San Pablo!" reiterated the trainman. "Don't forget your bag -gage."

"Thanks," returned the only passenger who evinced intention to alight. "I'm traveling skeleton rigged to-day. Do you happen to know in which direction the sanatorium is located?"

"Take the road at the end of the platform, and follow your nose. Can't miss it. It's in sight around the first curve," said the trainman as the passenger stepped off

"Thank you."

Clyde Jones turned his back on the Del Monte Limited which, although scheduled for a stop here on its south bound trip, had barely hesitated. He looked at his watch as the trainman flung the "hit-the-ball" signal to the conductor, peering back from a forward coach.

It was already ten twenty-five o'clock in the forenoon. The limited was a bit behind, owing to having been pocketed between San Francisco and San José by a long freight which, owing to a greasy rail, caused by a light shower, was making laborious effort to head in

Here, however, there was no sign of rain. As Jones took the road the air was pellucid and fragrant with the scents of fall flowers. The surf beneath his feet was springy with needles from the pines fringing the highway and scarcely a more propitious day, weather considered, could have been chosen for his errand. Jones, however, was too absorbed in his thoughts to do more than casually note the balmly air and delightful surroundings.

His meditations were decidedly unusual. He had come to San Pablo on a quest so extraordinary that he half feared that, if it should it become known, it would be construed as a mental vagary only a degree removed from that which the institution was designed to correct, if possible

Certainly, above all things else, he must go through with it, now that he had come this far; yet the more he thought on it the more semi insane it appeared—well, if not that, at least idiotic

Presently he came round a curve in the road and descried his destination. The main building of the San Pablo Sanatorium for Mental Defectives was a large, rather ornate structure with a pretentious tower.

It was set on a knoll in the midst of big lawns studded with bigger trees. Back of it the distant turquoise gleam of the ocean lent an added touch of color, restful and recalling the back-drop of a theater scene

Except for grisly iron bars, discernible on

the upper stories, it resembled the elaborate residence of a gentleman of affluence and good taste. Jones shrugged and kept doggedly on. It was his first visit and he had expected something rather different.

As different, in fact, as the nature of his errand itself, which was so decidedly fantastic that it would never do to reveal it. Yet, as he knew no one in the institution, either inmates or custodians, he still had to devise ways and means of going through it and emerging without arousing suspicion as to his real errand.

It must be done quickly, if at all. He hastily consulted a time-table. The next train that stopped at San Pablo was twin to the one on which he arrived, up-bound from Del Monte to San Francisco

It was due in just two hours from the time of his arrival and there was no other train to San Francisco until near midnight.

Hare-brained as the impulse was that had brought him to the entrance of this institution, Jones decided that he would carry the matter through. It might be a waste of time or it might lead—and he fondly hoped it would—to conditions so far removed from his present semi-indigent state that he could and would rejoice, instead of regret, that he had flaunted the conventional and boldly launched out for a voyage to regions wholly unknown.

He entered the main office and inquired for the superintendent. An attendant escorted him to a private office just off the main hall, proffered a chair, and observed:

"Dr. Fenway is busy just now, but he will be with you in a moment."

The visitor ensconced himself comfortably in the chair and looked around as the attendant withdrew. The room was about twelve by fourteen feet in size. A flat topped desk, with the usual complement of utensils for clerical convenience and a litter of papers on its top, occupied much of the space; a large volume lying flat on a shelf with pages open was flanked by a series of books in dust-proof cases, and on the wall at the end of the room, next to a door opening into the interior of the building, hung a colored chart of the human brain, sprinkled with a series of scientific names which the visitor noted with a whimsical smile.

He owned a brain, too; and, doubtless, it was equipped or endowed with the same numerous devices which science had so painstakingly charted for the edification of visitors to this office. The more he looked at it the more Jones decided that a brain was a very formidable and complicated apparatus and that it was not to be wondered that so many people suffered derangements of a kind that necessitated care and supervision.

He was still staring at it in a semihypnotized sort of way when a dapper little man with a Vandyke beard splotched with gray came briskly in from the main hall, inclining his head in an urbane nod, with the words:

"You wished to see me, sir?"

The visitor turned.

"Yes, doctor," he replied. "I—

Before he could complete the sentence the door at the end of the room opened without ceremony and an individual whisked into the private office in a manner which brought home to Clyde Jones, rather emphatically, that some, at least, of the human beings inhabiting this locality had brains which impelled them to do very curious things indeed—if not extraordinary ones.

## CHAPTER II.

### ENTER, MELANCHOLY AND MISCHIEF.

AT a period of time which synchronized rather closely with the entrance of Clyde Jones to the main office of San Pablo Sanatorium, and at a point not far removed from where he was seated, another series of events not down on the regular daily curriculum of the institution were transpiring in what was technically known as the "harmless ward."

Two rows of inmates, all men, were seated in chairs, with folded arms, as required by the rules, when Attendant Judkins solemnly enumerated them prior to seizing a large, black bottle and a rather battered spoon and descending from the rostrum where he had been checking up the count.

"Zubrowski!" called the attendant, who

was garbed in a gray-blue uniform, as he approached a thick-set figure in the front row.

The man addressed raised his hand. He was a low-browed, sullen Polish type, with deep, furtive eyes, in which an habitual expression of ineradicable sorrow now mingled with one of lively apprehension.

He was seated between two other men. His neighbor on the left had a shock of blond hair and a beard of the same hue. His forehead was high, his features regular, stopping just short of the classic Grecian profile. His gray-blue eyes, moreover, gleamed with mischief as the attendant approached, although he was careful to preserve an air of decorum.

On the Pole's right was another fellow, rather short, thin, and with a serio-comic expression on his crafty face. He, too, save for an alert expectancy, was a model of obedience.

"Time to take your medicine, Zubrowski," said the attendant, as he uncorked the bottle and balanced the battered spoon in his huge hand. "Be nice, now, for it'll make you feel better."

"I don' wanta feel better," plaintively growled the patient, wriggling in his chair.

"Dr. Fenway's orders," returned the attendant, phlegmatically. "Just open your mouth or I'll 'ave to send for the poker and pry your teeth apart."

He approached quite close to the recalcitrant Pole.

"Aw, give him a little time to think it over," scoffed the man with the yellow hair and beard, a satirical smile curving his lips.

"Silence, Chanley. You know the rules."

"To be sure, Judkins. I've been here long enough to know them forward, backward, and sideways. But, is there anything in the rules that forbids a patient addressing an attendant with a respectful request?"

Judkins glanced at him with heavy scorn.

"You're supposed to be off your chump, Chanley," he returned.

"A great truth which no one can deny," blandly returned the inmate, "especially, Judkins, since it's of record on my commitment. Thank you, however, for stating an unpleasant fact so delicately."

Judkins glanced at him, suspiciously. So engrossing was the scrutiny that he quite failed to discern the behavior of the inmate on Zubrowski's right. The Pole's sullen face became irradiated at the defense Chanley had interposed in his behalf. He loathed the noxious medicine and every second gained before being coerced into swallowing it was very gratifying.

"What do you mean, Chanley, by that word 'delicately'?" queried Judkins, pompously.

Judkins felt that discipline forbade his allowing the yellow-haired patient to challenge his authority, even indirectly, without a rebuke

"Why, my dear Judkins, merely the implication of doubt that my commitment is final, which you create. You say: 'You are supposed to be off your chump,'" imperturbably returned Chanley.

He was talking merely to gain time, while the serio-comic chap on Zubrowski's right could complete certain plans previously agreed upon.

Judkins evoked what he intended to be a superior smile by way of a rejoinder to Chanley's reply. He was not an especially brilliant man—had he been he would not have been in charge of the harmless ward at San Pablo.

Notwithstanding, he possessed a vanity as prodigious as his phlegm, and the subtle tribute which Chanley's last reply contained quite disarmed him of any possible umbrage, as well as made him oblivious of what was happening the other side of Zubrowski.

The serio-comic patient was now sitting erect, although a moment earlier he had been bending forward, very much out of the "position" that the rigid rules required.

"Well, Zubrowski?" Judkins turned again toward the melancholy Pole, who obdurately shook his head.

"Come, now. I'll have to count, then," went on the attendant, his tone harsher and his bearing more truculent. "One, two, three—and when I get to ten—the poker!"

"Allow me, Judkins!" beamed Chanley. "Give him a bit of grace while you ask Dr. Fenway if my pink slip is on hand this morning.

"Must have it, Judkins, you know. That pink slip is far more important than that this type of the Eocene period—"

"Which?" echoed Judkins, frowning.

"Eocene," smiled Chanley. "Rather remote period, Judkins—even prior to the period when you first allowed the light of your countenance to illumine our darkened lives. If I remember correctly, it antedated the arrival of the dinosaur and other prehistoric reptiles—"

He stopped abruptly, thrust his head forward, his eyes protruding with horror and his whole expression undergoing a Protean change as he riveted his gaze on a spot behind the attendant.

"What's up now, Chanley?" demanded Judkins, phlegmatically, without taking his eyes from the figure of the fluent speaker

Chanley seemed to make a mighty effort to regain his composure.

"My dear Judkins, I'm not altogether sure that anything's up. But, if I'm not subject to hallucinations this morning—and you know, old chap, that my commitment alleges that I'm subject to recurring hallucinations on ever so many things—I imagined, just as I referred to the reptilian period, that I saw a large—or, perhaps an overly large would be more accurate—specimen of a genus invertebrate, more commonly called ophidian, or still more commonly called snake, ascending the atmosphere immediately behind your sturdy figure, poising its head with the evident intention or fastening its deadly fangs in your trousers.

"Mind you, Judkins, I do not state this to be a fact—I may be subject to one of these hallu—"

Judkins might have scoffed but for a plainly discernible "whir-r-r" at this instant, synchronizing, exactly, with a much more discernible pang in a portion of his anatomy located rearward.

At the same instant the patient with the serio-comic physiognomy leaped wildly to the back of his chair, perching on it like a parrot, and shrilling "Snake!" in a high falsetto which had been a bread-winning "contra tenor" ere cleptomania made a mess of a minstrel singer.

Hereabouts Judkins lost his phlegm and began a series of irregular geometrical figures, which Chanley gravely described to Zubrowski as "a concentric curve, a parabola, and an elongated ellipse," the last of which carried Judkins to the door of the harmless ward. Meanwhile the rattling of the alleged reptile remorselessly persisted, mingling with screeches from the ex minstrel

Judkins bounded through the door and down the corridor, with the alleged serpent still pendant. Thus accoutered he entered Dr. Philip Fenway's private office without formality, still indulging in gyrations which on the part of an inmate might have been overlooked or condoned, but on the part of an employee certainly necessitated an explanation.

## CHAPTER III.

### "ASSORTED NUTS."

THE grotesque spectacle which Judkins presented for the edification of Clyde Jones was scarcely less amazing to the superintendent, although sights and sounds of an abnormal kind were common enough in Dr. Fenway's professional experience

The gyrating attendant saw only his superior saw him through a haze of terror which tinged the drawn lines of his own face with purplish hue, while the infernal "whir-r-r" accentuated the poignant pain at the point of original contact.

Dr. Fenway vociferated a command

"Stop!"

Judkins obeyed through force of habit rather than volition.

"If you must indulge in antics that would shame a whirling dervish," said Dr. Fenway, caustically, "why select my private office when the yard is broader?"

Judkins was incapable of replying, save with an incoherent gasp. Beads of sweat studded his square forehead and dribbled down his face. He stood quivering like a frightened horse as the superintendent examined the caudal device.

"An ingenious ornament," coolly commented Dr. Fenway, detaching it, "comprising a safety pin, the leather ends of several suspenders neatly braided, and termi-

nating in a tiny alarm-clock with the bell stuffed with paper. Why the decoration, Judkins?"

"My word!" exploded the attendant. "Doctor, I thought it was a bloomin' rattlesnake. I beg your parding. They put up a job on me, sir. After I felt the jab of that pin, I fancied I was bitten."

"Rattlesnakes, Judkins, do not bloom—as you phrase it—in the ward under your care. In the dipsomaniac section they occasionally are seen in the visions of patients, only. At least, I recall no exceptions. You may retire."

He turned to his caller

"I believe I missed your name, sir," he said, suavely.

The visitor extended a card, with the legend:

CLYDE JONES
**Purveyor of Profitable Publicity**

"Can I serve you professionally?" asked Dr. Fenway, twirling his eye-glasses by their cord.

His caller fidgeted.

"Not exactly, doctor. I'm an advertising man. Business is rather quiet and I took a day off.

"Came up this way and thought I'd like to look through the place, if you have no objection, and, perhaps, chat with some of the inmates."

"There's no particular objection," said the superintendent, slowly, "if you have no ulterior motive. Any one here an acquaintance of yours?"

"Not a soul that I know of."

"I asked, because two years ago a clever young woman visited us and the next Sunday panned the place in one of the city papers with a screed that made Dante's 'Inferno' read like 'Paradise Regained.' The state board of control suggested that I take precautions against another incident of that kind."

"Nothing like that," said Jones, earnestly. "The fact is," he went on in a burst of confidence, "I've been told that institutions like this often contain some very brainy men. Is that true of your place?"

"Oh, yes, if by brainy you mean imaginative. Otherwise, they wouldn't be here. Why? Do you feel any symptoms?" facetiously returned the superintendent.

Jones flushed beet-red.

"Recently a man called me crazy when I mentioned, casually, that I held his daughter in some slight esteem and inquired his views on the topic."

Fenway grinned.

"I infer that your thirst for information was speedily assuaged."

"He was rather irascible. But I don't know that I'm any crazier than his contemporaries thought Columbus was, although that was the beginning of my idea to explore an asylum, if there's no objection."

He fished out a photograph with an air of engaging candor and passed it to the physician.

"That's the girl," he added.

"H-m! She's certainly a very attractive young lady. I quite apprehend your particular mania, Mr. Jones—but it's too common to permit my receiving you as a patient. So we'll let it go at that.

"Just write your name and address on the register, and under the column marked 'Reason for Call' you might—well, you might charge it to Cupid and Columbus! Not, bad, eh?"

Jones grinned as he complied. The diversion caused by Judkins's unexpected advent had rather smoothed his path. There was now no peril to his cherished and secret motive for wishing to explore the sanatorium, and he prepared to follow the superintendent with emotions as novel as Columbus on landing at San Salvador.

Dr. Fenway paused only long enough to open a drawer of his desk and take from it a long, pink slip of paper, which he carefully placed in his wallet before ringing for an attendant. Jones followed them through an iron door into the main hall, listening, meanwhile, to the physician's comments.

"The incurable cases of mania, such as homicide or suicide, would only depress you, I fear. We'll avoid those. But, here

is a curious case." He paused before the door of a small room. It contained no furniture except a mattress, on which, in a pose not unlike a contortionist, was a man.

"He thinks he's been turned inside out and wants to undo the damage," said the doctor, while Jones peered in at the pathetic spectacle. "How are you getting on, Porter?" he inquired of the inmate.

The man smiled, broadly.

"All fixed up, now, but my left leg, doctor, and that ought to be back in place by dinner time. Do I get out, then?" cheerily inquired the afflicted one.

"The minute you're normal, out you go," equivocated Fenway, passing on. Thus encouraged, Porter began a furious manipulation of his bare toes, as if on the last lap to the freedom he coveted.

In the next room a solemn-faced man with a patriarchial beard was carefully greasing a groove which he had cut in a spinning wheel of the vintage of, Jones judged, 1776.

"Perpetual motion — hopeless case," commented Fenway. "Got the problem all solved save for sufficient tallow to counteract friction; then that device of his, he thinks, will be still running when the sun is dark and the earth has been void of life for a hundred million years.

"But he's as happy, or more so, than many so-called normal people. Now, be sure and bow from the hips when we get to the next case. He's a Russian, mad as the proverbial hatter, and fancies himself the late Czar."

Jones caught sight of a man with a wizen face, whose head was topped with a tinsel crown cocked rakishly sidewise, with a feather boa around his neck, wielding a "scepter" which had once done duty as a bass-drum stick

"Good morning, your majesty!" said Dr. Fenway, inclining his head.

"Good morning, Alexandrovitch. Whom have you with you?"

"One of your majesty's humble vassals. Have you breakfasted, sire?"

"But poorly. Send me a turbot from the Caspian Sea for dinner," frowned the grotesque figure. "Also, Alexandrovitch, do not allow any one to see that mad monk, Illidor. He is the bane of our royal existence."

"Your majesty's commands shall be obeyed, and Illidor shall be confined until you decree his release."

The superintendent turned to the chief attendant.

"Fried flounder for the Czar's repast this evening, Whitney. Make a note of it, please."

They walked on a few steps, turning to another door which opened on a larger room at the left. Here Fenway paused.

"Speaking of brainy men, Mr. Jones, we have one chap in the harmless ward whose intellect makes that of an average man look like a tallow-dip alongside a modern searchlight. His chief hallucination, however, is that he's sane.

"He has an encyclopedic mind, otherwise, and but for a twisted brain-cell might have been a great genius. Maybe he is, anyway. Who knows?"

They stepped into the next room, the chief attendant opening the door. Dr. Fenway glanced at the inmates and beckoned to the man with the blond beard, who came forward with an air of one always at his ease

"Mr. Chanley," said he, urbanely, "meet Mr. Clyde Jones, of San Francisco, by occupation a purveyor of profitable publicity and one of the city's rising young men."

Chanley bowed and gravely took the extended hand.

"Rising young men?" he iterated, turning toward the superintendent. "Oh, yes, I get you, doctor. Elevator, of course."

He whirled on Jones.

"Cable or plunger type?"

"I'll look it up when I get back," laughed the visitor, as the doctor and his aid moved aside in response to a signal from Judkins, who was frowning, portentously, at every one in the room

Chanley smiled into his yellow beard.

"That's the spirit. Never get too far up-stage, Jones. Bad business. Look at Judkins."

He waved toward his guardian

"I saw him in Dr. Fenway's office a few minutes ago," said the visitor.

"Hooray!" whispered Chanley. Then, with decorous gravity that spoke well for his sense of humor, he continued, *sotto voce:*

"Judkins is inclined to be peevish because we denuded him of his artificial dignity a while back. Around this time of the day, usually, he's so upstage that he thinks he's Sarah Heartburn, and by nightfall he's metamorphosing into Douglas Banksfair.

"So, with the aid of an able young man who was once quite famous for his rendition of that lacrimose ballad: 'She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage,' we took him down a notch or two, this morning. See that chap with the serio-comic face talking with Dr. Fenway?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's Fagin Orton. That ballad I mentioned was once a bread-winner for him in the burnt-cork epoch, and his contra-tenor will still make Dick José want to borrow your carbolic acid. But, now, he's a confirmed cleptomaniac and if he offers to sing for you, keep him at least eight feet away

"The last time he sang for a visitor he purloined the fellow's glass eye. The deluded visitor didn't miss it until he was halfway across the continent trying to look at some scenery near Salt Lake."

The return of Dr. Fenway, at this juncture, interrupted Chanley's conversation.

"I'm going through the incurable wards now, Mr. Jones," said the superintendent, "so if you'd like to chat with Chanley here for a few minutes, either in this ward or out on the lawn, why, you may do so.

"Judkins or Whitney"—he indicated the chief attendant—"will pass you back to my office when you wish to leave. Here's your daily check, Chanley," he concluded, extending the bit of pink paper

"Thank you, doctor," said Jones; "I'll visit with Mr. Chanley, if you don't mind, although I must catch the Del Monte Limited back to town."

Fagin Orton strolled over in their direction as the superintendent and Whitney left by the same door they had entered. He grinned impishly.

"How 'd you like to hear me sing?" he asked.

"Mr. Jones has heard your star song," said Chanley

"But," persisted the other, "I know 'After the Ball,' too. Maybe he never heard that?"

"Mind your garters," sepulchrally whispered Clyde's mentor. "Orton's on a still hunt for rubber. Constructing a miniature catapult with which to propel projectiles molded from bread toward the facial orifice of Judkins, when that worthy gentleman gets drowsy."

"Some other time, perhaps," said Jones to Orton, who grinned, as he padded off

"By the way," said Chanley, "what did Dr. Fenway say your business was?"

"I am an advertising man."

"Advertising," said Chanley, slipping his arm familiarly through that of the caller, "is a misnomer. It's really all attempted salesmanship. Try it on anything from toys to town-sites, and you'll find I'm right."

Jones was so surprised at the sentiment that he was without words for the moment, as they moved toward another door leading out into a very pleasant section of the grounds, surrounded, however, by an impregnable wall.

Then Chanley added:

"I anticipate a pleasant half-hour with you, sir."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BIG IDEA.

"SUPPOSE," continued the polysyllabic Chanley genially, "we establish our acquaintance on a more familiar basis? My misguided but delighted parents signalized my advent by seizing on Harold, in some mysterious fashion, as my handle. What's yours?"

"Clyde."

"All set, Clyde. Suppose we continue to be as candid as it is possible to be over that mysterious abyss between sanity and its opposite. To borrow Dr. Fenway's stock interrogatory:

"'In what way can I serve you—professionally?'"

His mimicry was so astoundingly true to

life that Clyde Jones laughed unrestrainedly.

"You're a brick, Harold!" he exclaimed.

"Wrong, Clyde. He's over in the incurable ward trying to glue himself to the wall. We're here.

"Lovely lawn, isn't it? Note the birds, Clyde, for they have real bills, wings, and tails. No hallucinations or delusions about them

"The tulips, too"—he waved toward a flower-bed—"have genuine petals, stamens, pistils, stems, and roots. What a kind-hearted commonwealth it is, after all! Well, tell me something about yourself. Got a card or a letter-head?"

"Both," laughed the visitor, producing them. Chanley glanced at them

"Since you're not up-stage like Judkins, may I be frank with you?"

"Surely. What do you think of the idea?"

"Alliteration, Clyde, is the hall-mark of an amateur. And I'll wager that business is rotten, eh?"

Jones flushed.

"Rather. But how did you guess it?"

Chanley tapped the card, smiling.

"Not difficult, Clyde. I can diagnose it offhand. For instance, take a so-called successful business man. Usually he gets hostile when you try to sell him something, although he waxes very oleaginous when he's trying to sell something to some one else, eh?"

"You've said it."

"Even," continued Chanley, with an odd mixture of complacency and earnestness, "when you try to sell him something that he's got to sell to some one else, he's hard to manage."

"Too true, Harold. Go on, please."

"Well, just put yourself in his place and look at yourself. He gets your card. He emits a snort of indignation, for he visualizes you mentally as one of these 'do-it-now' boys—an ebullient young squirt—who's coming in to tell him how to run his business.

"Now, he's been running it for quite some time, generally, and with some relative degree of success, or he wouldn't be in business when you arrive, would he?"

"Admirable logic, Harold. Well, what would you prescribe for such cases?"

"First, a negative. Don't antagonize—attract him."

"But –how?"

There was a feverish tone to Clyde's query, and Chanley smiled again cryptically

"My dear fellow, please remember that I'm insane."

Jones scratched his head.

"Harold," he blurted, "I don't care if you are or not. But, since I agreed to be frank, I'm going the whole route with you. I'd rather hear you talk than any of the brotherhood of my profession in the Bay Cities. You've got them all stopped!"

"I suppose I ought to swell up at such flattery as if my name was Judkins," returned the imperturbable Chanley; "but, instead, I'll continue."

"Do, please."

Jones was still eager, and Chanley came a little closer, waving the offending card and letterhead under his nose.

"You've got to attract instead of antagonizing a prospective customer for what you want to sell," said he, "or else your conduct is fatal at the very outset to that psychopathic moment you hope to eventually reach—the moment when he slips you that coveted bit of pink or blue or yellow paper, with the name of a bank lithographed on it, a few figures preceded by the dollar mark, and completes the sum total of your bliss by signing it with his name."

"I get you perfectly."

"You only think you do. Any one could tell you what I've told you—it's merely a sugar-coated bromid. But once you get the principle behind it—or once you can induce that psychopathic condition in a hard-shell business man, you'll sell him."

He paused impressively and stepped back a pace.

"Well, would you mind defining the principle?"

"Clyde, allow me to remind you again that I'm a lunatic. Officially certified as one. If I wasn't, we wouldn't be out in this yard talking over your perplexities."

"I don't see many signs of it," said Jones stoutly.

"Lunacy," said Chanley with a dazzling smile, "is a generic term covering all sorts of mental abnormality. Yet who shall say where it begins or where it ends?

"Remember that story about the old Quaker, and his remark that 'Every one in the world is queer but thee and me; and thee is a little queer'?"

He laughed the delicious, rollicking laugh of a normal human being; a laugh as far removed as the poles from the high-pitched, feverish cackle of one in whom hallucinations or delusions replace the normal outlook on life. His auditor laughed, too, for the humor was infectious

Chanley was a mighty clever chap; but, somehow, he stopped just short of what Clyde really wanted to know. So he said:

"So far you've diagnosed my business difficulty very accurately. But how shall I right-about-face as you suggest? And what's the principle you mentioned?"

His mentor waved toward the building.

"Every man in there," he went on, "is insane. Dr. Fenway will tell you so. That is, they each have some one idea that dominates their conscious mind to the exclusion of the proper consideration of other ideas.

"One man wants to kill himself. Another thinks some one has turned him inside out. Still another thinks he can make a spinning-wheel spin after the planets in our solar system have lost their motion.

"But they're all crazy on one thing. I'm the only exception," he went on, with mock gravity belied by his humorous eyes, "and I'm crazy about everything.

"There's your principle, Clyde. Get your business prospect to thinking of nothing but one thing; thinking so hard that he'll lose sight of the proper consideration of other ideas—that he's being swindled, for instance, which is what most of them think of your well-meaning but clumsy approach. Psychologize 'em and you've got the open-sesame to their bank-books."

Jones nodded. Over Chanley's head he caught a glimpse of the hands of a clock on the tower.

It was fortunate that he did so, for he saw that he had already consumed an hour of his allotted time, and it would be rather rude of him to look at his watch, especially when he wished to placate this extraordinary chap a little more, and get his idea for a specific case which he had in mind.

That, in short, was the sole object of his visit to the sanatorium. Clyde Jones had exhausted every possible concept which had originated in his own fecund brain to put over a contract with a big business house in San Francisco.

It was not alone the money and prestige which he would thereby acquire, but also the fact that one of the heavy investors and nominal directors of that same corporation was Jacob Holmes, the father of Vivian Holmes, and the man who had irascibly termed the young advertising man "crazy" when he ventured to ask permission to address his daughter.

As yet Jones had kept his plans to himself, and hence had a virgin field for effort with the concern in which Jacob Holmes was a power. But until now he had never been able to evolve any idea of sufficient merit or novelty which he felt would warrant him in putting his business, as well as his personal, fortunes to the desperate hazard.

And now, much to his amazement, the quixotic quest on which he had embarked as a forlorn hope was "panning out" like the fabled "pay dirt" of the old Argonaut days, when California ran yellow with gold and red with the life-blood of men who fought to find it.

If he could only get Chanley to come across with one idea as practicable as his theories, thus far proved to be both shrewd and profound, there was a splendid chance that he could "bring home the bacon," with a vengeance.

So, with inward tremors, Clyde Jones, sane, put the final query to Harold Chanley, official lunatic, with due and becoming modesty.

"Harold, you've diagnosed my ailment and prescribed a remedy. But how can I fill that prescription—that is, apply the principle in a specific case like this?"

He sketched it hurriedly, yet with enough facts to warrant a specific reply.

Chanley looked at him with twinkling eyes.

"Who's the lady, Clyde?" he asked bluntly.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A BIRD IN A GILDED CAGE.

JONES flushed and produced the photograph he had shown to Fenway. Chanley scanned it avidly and passed it back

"I've no words for her," said he with a simple dignity that Jones found very appealing. Chanley might be a lunatic, but, nevertheless, he was no less a gentleman.

"May I offer you my congratulations, old man?" he continued. "You've got the only right idea of life, for ambition is a tree whose fruit is bitter when we finally pick it, except for the privilege of sharing it with some one we share life with meanwhile.

"Heigh-ho! Here I am getting sentimental. First thing you know, Clyde, I'll be emulating Fagin Orton, and launch into that ancient and lacrimose but bread-winning ballad of his: 'She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage!'

"Mustn't trespass on Orton's musical preserves. Well, to get back to earth. I might offer you a suggestion. However, I'm not sure it wouldn't confirm Dr. Fenway's diagnosis of me—that I think I'm sane."

"He did tell me that," admitted his auditor.

"Oh, he tells every one that," said Chanley with a gesture of indifference. "Fenway is one of those types that remind you of a toy balloon. One might call him a super-Judkins.

"He's inflated with the idea of his own erudition, and relies on a few stock phrases and a certain shallow facetiousness to create an impression. But he lacks spontaneity and he hates originality.

"The perfect type of man, according to Dr. Fenway -or, let us say, the perfect type of a normal man—is, first, a Dr. Philip Fenway; all others should emulate Judkins, because Judkins isn't so intelligent that he'd ever get dangerous, nor so domineering that he'd dispute a nominal superior.

"Judkins, in short, is a lethargic, quasi-brutal, human automaton; lacking the perceptivity of a child of ten, a toady and a sycophant. Pardon the digression, Clyde—perhaps it, too, is a sign of my mental malady -but if Judkins hadn't turned up to brighten my interminable days, I think I should have gone as mad in reality as I am officially certified to be."

"If you are really mad," said Jones impulsively, "then I feel like a candidate for an institute for idiots."

"Thanks. But we're wandering, I fear. Let's accept the inevitable, and return to your pursuit of the elusive ham sandwich and the lemon-colored limousine in which, some day, you hope to install the lady of your heart.

"You asked for details of my prescription. Give me the precise details of the case you have in mind."

Jones complied. Chanley smiled. Then in terse, succinct sentences, which boiled up in sequence so rapid as to fairly hypnotize his listener, he outlined a plan so bizarre, so original, and yet so practical that it left Jones stupefied with its sheer brilliancy.

"Do it that way," said Chanley, as he finished, "and this firm—what's it's name?"

"Welcome Blend Coffee Company."

"Well, I'll stake my reputation as a learned lunatic that you harpoon them for every centavo they can beg or borrow—that is, of course, if you don't lose your nerve. Got the idea?"

"Cinched!" tersely returned Jones, flashing another glance at the clock on the tower. It was just fifteen minutes to twelve.

He had plenty of time to pay his respects to Dr. Fenway, thank him for the courtesy he had exhibited, and still get back to town with the most astounding advertising idea of which he had ever dreamed—only much more so.

Then he glanced at Chanley, who had stooped, and was deftly kidnaping a huge grasshopper with a digital dexterity that fairly defied the eye.

"But Harold," he began a little lamely, as he realized how deeply indebted he was

to this unfortunate but brilliant individual, "if I accept your ideas, and cash-in on them, I must reciprocate in some way.

"There's just one thing that you haven't said as yet, which, I understand, all really insane people finally declare to visitors of a sympathetic trend—that you are not really insane."

The ubiquitous Chanley straightened up and gravely held out the grasshopper.

"I might criticise the superintendent," he blandly returned; "but really, Clyde, would it be good form to contradict him?"

The ad-writer rubbed his head in a perplexed fashion.

Chanley flashed him another enigmatic, mystifying smile.

"But," continued Clyde Jones, "I'm serious. I really can't accept an idea that might make me a huge sum of money and not do something for you in return."

"All right. When you go out, flatter Dr. Fenway, if you feel like it. Confirm his diagnosis of my condition."

Jones shook his head.

"Really, Harold, I couldn't, because I'd be lying. And I hate a liar."

"But allow me to overcome your prejudice," smoothly continued the other man. "See this blank check? Well, Clyde, every day I insist on Dr. Fenway giving me a fresh blank check.

"Every day I sit down and organize a cinder trust, fill out the check for ten millions, and insist on having it sent to an Eastern banking house. I've kept him writing to lithographers all over the country for samples, for months," he chuckled.

"Don't you want to get out of here?"

"Why state the obvious or sigh for the forbidden flesh-pots?" jeered the other. "Listen, instead, to a short disquisition on the genus coleoptera—high-brow for plain grasshopper!"

Again he extended the insect in his hand with a semiderisive air that completely baffled the man to whom he had just thrown a life-line as truly as if Jones had been a shipwrecked mariner, struggling in the surf of the Pacific, whose distant boom now came clearly to his ears for the first time, as he waited to hear what Chanley would say next.

"Now observe, Clyde, the spiracles, or breathing spores, along the abdomen of this interesting insect. Note, also, he is very well provided with both simple and compound eyes. The simple ones are located at the base of the antennæ, or feelers.

"If Dr. Fenway were equipped in similar fashion with compound optics, he wouldn't have to glance over his shoulder or turn around suddenly when passing through the incurable ward, would he?"

"I suppose not," answered the ad writer. "But "

"Ah-ah! I see that you still insist on doing me a favor. Very well, Clyde.

"Then, when you leave, do this: When you go into Dr. Fenway's private office—and you have to pass through it, you know, to get out—ask that eminent but rather inflated alienist a question, will you?"

"Yes"

"Ask him," continued Chanley, swiftly, "this: 'Doctor, just what is insanity?' And he'll tell you that "Insanity is an abnormal condition of the mind.'

"Then you say: 'But, doctor, I've got a better definition. Insanity is a condition of the conscious mind, wherein one idea dominates to the exclusion of the proper consideration of other ideas.' Then, let this grasshopper fall or jump on his desk—and go right on out—will you?"

"What's the big idea?" asked Jones, in a nonplused fashion.

"Clyde, I give you my word of honor I'd rather have you do just that—and nothing more or less—than to have you besiege the main gate with a battery of hungry lawyers, the remains of the Magna Charta, a writ of habeas corpus, and nine lean and hungry alienists—all ready to swear me the sanest man in bedlam!

"I really would, old boy. But remember, I'm not sane. I'm officially the contrary."

"But why?"

Chanley laughed, uproariously.

"Well, Clyde, for one thing, a lunatic should be—especially when he's a rara avis such as I'm advertised as being—he should be as reliable as a stake horse in a handicap race and always run true to form.

Own up, now, Clyde—you were told that, too, by Fenway?"

"Something of the sort," said Jones, taking the grasshopper. "But—"

"If you really want to reciprocate that alleged favor—"

"I surely do, Harold."

"Then slowly repeat that definition, Clyde." Jones obeyed.

"Fine!" enthused Chanley. "Well, I guess we'd better break away, now. You needn't go away back up to the harmless ward to get Judkins to let you out—this door,-with the push-button, leads into a corridor that the chief attendant guards.

"He'll show you to Dr. Fenway's office. *Adios*, Clyde, and, as the Chinese say, 'May your shadow never grow less!'"

He walked away, nonchalantly humming a parody on Fagin Orton's bread-winning ballad of the burnt-cork days before kleptomania had led him, too, to San Pablo.

"I'm only a bird in a gilded cage,
A pitiful sight to see.
I ought to be happy and free from care—
I'm not—though I seem to be!"

Then only did Clyde Jones really perceive the massive gate with the button Chanley had indicated, which he proceeded to press. It was several minutes before the man whom Dr. Fenway had called Whitney came.

But it did not seem long, because Jones was still thinking of Chanley—trying to decide whether he was an eccentric genius or really crazy.

## CHAPTER VI

### A GRASSHOPPER FOR DR. FENWAY.

IT was all of fifteen minutes, in fact, before Whitney came to the door; and even then he scrutinized the ad writer rather dubiously, before inserting the key.

"Why didn't you go out the other way?" he asked.

"Chanley's suggestion," returned Jones. "We wandered down here and as Dr. Fenway had said either you or Mr. Judkins would pass me back to his office, I pressed this button. Did I inconvenience you?"

"No. I'm paid for this."

"Will you have a cigar?" added Jones. casually.

"Don't mind. What do you think of our prize nut?"

"I'll have to take a day or two off before I'll really know," laughed Jones, as he approached a bend in the hall. "Which way from here?"

"To your right. The corridor leads directly into Dr. Fenway's private office."

"Oh, yes. We came in from the main wing, didn't we?"

"Yes. Into the harmless ward. The other patients are segregated."

"Thank you, so much, Mr. Whitney. Good day, sir."

"Good day, Mr. Jones."

The attendant turned back along the corridor down which they had come, and the visitor after a few steps found himself in Dr. Fenway's office. The superintendent sat at his desk, apparently very much engrossed in some papers, for he did not immediately see Jones.

The clock above his head warned the latter that he had barely thirteen minutes to make the up-bound Del Monte Limited, if the latter was on time.

He stepped a little closer. The alienist looked up and into his eyes crept a curious gleam. From the intent gaze he gave Jones, one might have surmised that lunacy was contagious and that the superintendent, in turn, was suffering from a mild hallucination.

Jones, at least, had an impression that something rather abnormal was indicated by the other man's facial aspect, as he voiced the question which Chanley had so emphatically stated that he wished the visitor to put to the head of the institution:

"Doctor, just what is insanity?"

Dr. Fenway's jaw seemed to drop. Then, as if by a mighty effort, he pulled himself together. His voice, however, had a sepulchral tone as he gulped·

"Insanity—is—an -abnormal—condition—of the—mind!"

"But, doctor," argued the visitor, glibly, according to the agreed formula, "I've got a better definition. Insanity is a condition of the conscious mind, wherein one idea

dominates to the exclusion of the proper consideration of other ideas?"

With the words he released the grasshopper—Chanley's parting token.

Clyde Jones was still more astonished at the manner in which the question and definition were received than he had been perplexed at Chanley's quaint request to make them, despite the superlunatic's assurance that he would rather have it done than to have Clyde come to the institution with formidable legal instruments for his discharge.

Dr. Fenway's face grew ghastly white. He seemed to crumple up in his chair, as if suddenly shot through the heart.

The agile insect, as if to complete his perturbation—or whatever was responsible for the alienist's weird collapse—suddenly jumped from a sheet of paper and lighted in his whiskers.

Whereat, Dr. Fenway emitted a hollow groan and closed his eyes.

Nothing quite so horribly fantastic had ever occurred in the sanatorium. But two things impelled Clyde Jones, ad writer, to continue on his way without further pause.

One was his promise to the mystifying Chanley, the other the inexorable minute-hand of the clock, now fairly sprinting —or so it seemed—toward the time for the Del Monte up-bound to arrive at the station.

Without further delay, therefore, he walked into the main hall, out at the front door and down the steps. He lengthened his stride as he reached the road, and, when around the curve, as the sound of a faint crossing-signal down the line warned him that the up-bound express was on the dot, he broke into a run.

The train was within fifty yards of the station as he crossed the tracks. It seemed to have no intention of stopping, but the engineer, noting Clyde's gesture, smiled, reassuringly, and slowed to a rate of speed which enabled him to catch the last coach but one, ere the train came to a dead stop.

By the time the signal had been given to go ahead, Clyde was on the rear platform of a Pullman. He dropped into the first convenient chair, a little breathless from his sprint, and fumbled in his vest pocket for his fare.

The train and Pullman conductors approached, simultaneously. Clyde greeted them with a smile that was barren of mirth. There should have been a ten-dollar bill in his vest pocket, but there was no sign of it, either there or anywhere else about his person

"Ticket, please."

The two uniformed figures flanked him on either side.

Clyde looked up at a veteran in railway service, judging by the bars on his sleeve. Then he explained that he had either lost his money while running for the train, or had been deftly "trimmed" while visiting the sanatorium.

"But," he amended, "I've got a watch, conductor, and if you'll advance my fare and give me your name, I'll redeem it by check as soon as I get back to the city. My name is Clyde Jones and I have an office in Room 77, Portala Building." He extended his card.

"My name's Robinson—Nelson Robinson," returned the conductor. "All right, Mr. Jones, you look honest. I'll advance your fare—never mind the watch.

"I live over on Alameda Avenue, Fruitvale. You can mail it back to me."

"Mighty white of you!" rejoined Clyde, impulsively, "but, I'd rather you'd take the watch, especially as I want to go back by Pullman, too, and that's another half-dollar."

Robinson, counting his personal change, gave a smile.

"By George, I didn't know I was quite so short."

He turned to the Pullman conductor.

"Got any money, Sam?"

"Sure, Nelse. I'll see him through. Let's have a look at the watch?"

The embarrassed passenger whipped it out by the fob, meanwhile turning to Robinson, who punched the usual duplicate slip and extended him half of it, while the Pullman conductor, after inspecting and pocketing the timepiece, also tendered Jones a duplicate receipt for his fare.

Clyde drew a long breath and leaned back in the luxurious chair. He was rather winded from his sprint, excited over the fantastic morning, especially perplexed by

the final fifteen minutes at the sanatorium —while he was also churning, mentally, with the ideas which Chanley had shot at him with all the deadly nefariousness of a Browning machine gun potting enemies.

Despite their scource, those ideas were invaluable. Without further ado, Clyde Jones began setting down on one of his now *passé* letterheads words, phrases, sentences, while they were yet fresh in his mind. Thus engrossed, he not only ignored the Pullman conductor but every one else in the car

It was some time before he had finished. Then only did he pause and stare with unseeing eyes at the flying landscape, while he revisualized the extraordinary demeanor of Dr. Fenway, when Clyde had fulfilled his promise to Chanley hence and hereafter forever his benefactor—despite the sly way he had pilfered that lone ten-dollar bill.

"Poor Chanley!" said he to himself. "I guess he's insane, in spite of everything. It would certainly seem so, for Orton was never close enough to me to pick my pocket—of that, I'm positive.

"I wonder what lay back of his message to the superintendent? Oh, pshaw! I might guess for a thousand years."

The more he thought on it the more convinced the ad writer became that Chanley was inscrutable. Finally, he gave it up, save that he half-divined that, perhaps, in some way, Chanley had planned to prick the "inflated balloon," as he had described it, of the superintendent's self-esteem.

On the whole, such a unique purpose seemed to be entirely compatible with his brilliant, yet erratic, attitude toward everything and every one. He had patronized Jones; he had gently satirized his own confinement, and he had insisted on a whimsical departure—in lieu of any other compensation for what Jones knew was a really incalculable favor

"I wonder when I get in!" thought Jones, at this juncture.

He seized the time-table and pawed over it, nervously. Then he gave a low whistle of surprise. Until now he had ignored a tiny symbol opposite the name "San Pablo" in the column number of the train on which he had arrived at San Pablo and the one on which he was returning.

It was rather minute, but, when traced to the foot of the page amid other symbols, he found it interpreted as: "Stops only to discharge or take on passengers for San Francisco and points north, on signal."

"Gee, I'm a lucky guy!" said he, half aloud. "In ten minutes more I'll be winging for Room 77, Portala Building. That's the first of the five Bay Shore cut-off tunnels, or I'm a grasshopper that sings ballads of the vintage of the Spanish-American War.

"Well, let me see. In about one week from to-day, if the Welcome Blend Coffee Corporation doesn't welcome me and invite me to clap myself to their bank-roll, I'll have to go back to San Pablo for another shot of Harold Chanley's lunacy serum.

"But, as I'm still a do-it-now baby although off that purveyor-of-profitable-publicity stuff for life—I'll use this dope, first, and see how it works out."

## CHAPTER VII.

### PUTTING THE BIG IDEA TO WORK.

JUST thirty minutes subsequent to the arrival of the Del Monte Limited at Valencia Street station, San Francisco, Clyde Jones was busy in his little aerie, compounding Chanley's prescriptions for turning ghastly failure into invincible success.

He typed a letter on plain paper, making at the same time a carbon copy of it for his office file, signed it with four words of an enigmatic character, and then addressed a plain envelope to the Welcome Blend Coffee Corporation.

It was after banking hours, so he drew a check for fifteen dollars from his modest account, cashing it with the cigar dealer near the elevator, and then pinned a ten-dollar bill to the letter before inserting it in the envelope.

This done he attached a special-delivery stamp to the envelope, and dropped it into the chute.

The missive went out without any possible clue to the identity of the sender. This, too, was one of the basic principles of the Chanley prescription.

Clyde Jones chuckled as the letter fled from his fingers. It was only the beginning of the most novel and, so far as he could judge, the most practicable advertising idea of which he had ever heard

"I guess I'll regale the inner man," quoth Clyde Jones to himself. Forthwith he scuttled away to a restaurant and tried to eat. It was only a rather poor pretence, for the intoxication of the new idea obsessed him, for the time being.

Walking on air he returned to the office to read and reread the carbon copy of the letter, which he had left on his desk. The more he read, the more rosy were his visions.

That was one of the beauties of the letter. It could be used for practically any business. In short, Chanley's plan was as broad as the business world; and while Jones, for certain reasons of his own, very much wished to put it over on the first trial and with the firm he had mentioned, he knew that failure would be impossible, provided, as Charley had declared, he didn't lose his nerve.

"Columbus hadn't a thing on me," he chuckled, at length, "and I'll have something on that Cupid baby, before he can fit an arrow, by a week from now. Gee! This is sure a weird world.

"Won't I knock Vivian's crusty old dad into the crown of his billy-cock hat when I slip down there? What was it that Chanley said:

"'But to return to the elusive ham sandwich, the lemon-colored limousine, and the lady of your heart!' He called the turn—yes, he double-shot it, too.

"I wonder just how I'd feel parading Vivian in a yellow-colored limousine past the haughty parent that gave me my first tip, when he said I was 'crazy,' because I told him I held his daughter in some slight esteem? Well, we'll —"

The jangle of the telephone at his elbow gave him an unpleasant shock. He detached the receiver with a jerk.

"Is that you, Clyde?"

"Vivian—dar—"

"Sh!"

"I mean—I thought you were out of town, Miss Holmes."

"Be very careful, Clyde. I'm talking from our library and this phone has an extension to the butler's pantry. But I just had to call you up, from here—"

"Vivian, there's a booth, you know—just a block from—"

"I know it," she cut in, "but papa just answered a call on this wire and then he hurried out to use that one. Some one called him up and I thought I heard him mention your name.

"When he went out, I was sure of it. That's why I called right back to your office—on a chance. Clyde, you were on the Del Monte Limited, to-day."

"Yes. But, how—"

"S-h! Our housekeeper is a prying, old termagant, Clyde. I think papa said something to her just before he went hurrying out.

"Anyway, there's something dreadful impending. I can't give you the details, but must see you—at once."

"Dreadful!" he gasped.

"And it concerns you!"

"Me?"

Amazement, chagrin, perplexity, all tinctured the pronoun.

"Listen!"

There was an imperative note in her voice, now, reminding him that Vivian Holmes, only child of Jacob Holmes, affluent, pugnacious, and sagacious, inherited some of her father's famous traits.

It was not hard for him to visualize her small, dark, well-shaped head, nor the firm lines of her pretty lips, as she bent toward the receiver still closer, eyes sparkling with the glint of resolution to protect her lover—even if by so doing she incurred the displeasure of her father.

"I'm listening," said Clyde.

"Remember where we had our first lunch together?" asked Vivian.

"Yes. But it's closed—"

"Wait for me there or I'll wait for you, at the front entrance. Come as soon as you can get there. Hurry!"

She hung up. Clyde, waiting lest some one had been listening in on the extension, at last softly replaced his own receiver. Vague alarm flitted like a cloud across his former rosy dream-thoughts.

The prospect of putting over a big deal with the coffee firm held its chief attraction because of the inevitable corollary relative influence, to say nothing of prestige and the possible removal of the parental objection to his suit

Clyde had no idea, whatever, to what Vivian had referred, although her reference to the Del Monte up-bound train was rather ominous, now that he recalled the extraordinary effect of his compliance with Chanley's request on Superintendent Fenway

"But why," he asked himself, as he hurried away, "should any one get in touch with that crusty old magnate?"

He didn't know and decided to forego fruitless speculation. Whatever had happened, Vivian would tell him when they met. This proof of her loyalty, no less than her return of his affection, touched him deeply.

Her father was furious at the clandestine affection between them. He had treated Clyde rather cavalierly when that impulsive young man had approached him about the matter, referring to him as an "impecunious and presumptuous upstart" to even think of such a thing as marrying his daughter.

Clyde had been overwhelmed by his prospective father-in-law's irascibility. Instead of fighting back, he had rather weakly withdrawn, chiefly because of the odious inference that was next hurled at him that he had "mercenary motives" instead of merely being madly enamored of Vivian for her delectable self.

For Vivian, without a penny, would still have been rarely beautiful, winsome, wholesome; an inspiration and an ideal to any ambitious young man.

Clyde pressed the night-elevator bell. He descended, too absorbed in his present quandry to note the odd look the night watchman bent upon him, as he strode hastily out and climbed into the first taxi visible.

Almost immediately they passed another vehicle coming down the street. It was going at a smart pace, and pulled up in front of the Portala Building ere two minutes had elapsed.

Two men bounced out of it. The night watchman gave them a spirited explanation, including the number of the vehicle in which Clyde Jones had just driven away. But by this time, Clyde had turned off and was sprinting for the little French restaurant in the financial district where Vivian and he had pecked at delicious sandabs, baked *à la epicure* in paper bags, garnished with a sauce whose ingredients were a holy mystery, while they drank the nectar of the ancient gods from each other's eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ALARMS.

THE taxi's head-light did not reveal Vivian's trig figure, so Clyde, after driving two blocks further on, turned into another street, and dismissed the taxi there. Then he walked back to the now desolated restaurant to take up his vigil.

Finally she appeared. Her manner was furtive. She glanced back over her shoulder and although she lifted the thick veil which she wore and kissed him fondly, Clyde fancied there was about her an air of constraint contrasting sharply with her former ebullient joy on similiar rare occasions.

"Let's walk," said she, slipping her hand through his arm.

It was a half-block further on before she spoke again

"Clyde, I'm in a dreadful quandary. I'm very fond of you, as you know. But I love my father, too

"Father has—well—he has rather grave doubts about you and your business future, as you know. He said as much, didn't he, and rather bluntly when you called on him, that time?"

"Oh,. yes. But that's an old story, Vivian, isn't it? I didn't dispute him. Instead, I've been trying ever since to get into a position where such caustic criticisms won't again apply."

"I wasn't thinking of that alone, Clyde. I was thinking how far a girl situated as I am ought to go, especially when she's placed in such a peculiar position. My dear boy, have you done anything lately that is at

all questionable — in a business way, for instance?"

"Absolutely - no"

"You are sure?" she persisted, with a note of anxiety.

"About as sure as I am that I'm walking with you, dear."

She was silent for a little space. Her lover was utter nonplused. Vivian must have been very much alarmed, indeed, to have come to such a lonely rendezvous, unattended, and her present reticence was rather ominous and equally bewildering.

It was more. It was utterly foreign to the frank, ingenuous character of the girl around whom his entire life had pivoted since their first chance meeting.

Finally, she spoke:

"Clyde dear, I believe you're telling me the truth. So, I must be candid with you. Have you any idea why some one called papa up at the house to-night on the telephone, and asked him if he was on the Del Monte Limited, to-day?"

"I have no idea why they called, nor did I know he was on the same train with me."

"Clyde, we were both on it, in the last Pullman. You know we've been staying for the past week down at the Hotel Marquise."

"All I know, Vivian, was that you phoned me you were going out of town for two weeks. I had an idea you were over at Ross Valley, as usual."

"Well," said she, briskly, "that's immaterial. The first point is, you were on the train, too, isn't it?"

"Yes. What else, please?"

"I only caught another word or two but what I heard gave me such a scare that I'm not over it, yet. Of course, I couldn't hear what was said when papa answered the phone only his replies. As I recall it, it went something like this.

"Father said: 'Who? . . . Yes, I saw him. . . . Yes. . . . Yellow hair. . . . Name? . . . Jones. . . . What?' He almost exploded on that 'What?' Clyde, and I think he forgot I was also in the library, for the next words he said were: 'You're detectives? Huh' Say, wait a minute. Give me your number. I want to use another wire. Wait five minutes. . . . Yes. . . . I'll call you in five minutes.'

"Then he hung up and went out. I saw him going into the drug-store at the corner, but before he went out, Mrs. McReynolds, our housekeeper, and he were whispering in the hall. You understand now, don't you, why I was frightened? Why did detectives call papa up, and why were they talking about you, Clyde?"

Clyde had a vague idea that it might have something to do with Dr. Fenway. But his visit to the asylum was all part of a carefully cherished secret. He didn't want Vivian or her father to know what his plans were, until he had tested Chanley's amazing formula for the transforming of failure into a success so astounding that it would give spice to his subsequent narrative of how he had achieved it.

Vivian's recital, while it suggested things that might cause some temporary inconvenience to him, in no wise altered his firm belief in the plan he had already set in motion, while it increased his determination to allow nothing to interfere with its accomplishment.

So Clyde Jones equivocated when he said:

"I don't see how I missed seeing you. Vivian, or your father, if he saw me. What part of the train were you on?"

"In a stateroom in the last Pullman. But, Clyde, I was out on the observation platform, with Enid Somers, Mrs. McReynolds, and some other ladies. Papa was in the smoker, forward, with some men."

"I was in the next to the last car on the train, but I was so busy with my own affairs that I didn't notice the other passengers. Maybe that's how your father saw me without my happening to notice him.

"As for the rest of it, Vivian, all I can say is that I've been working like the proverbial Trojan, and I haven't a thing on my conscience, no matter what any one may say. I guess I'll go over to headquarters—"

"No, Clyde, don't. They'd only say it was a bluff or a grand stand play. And, don't you see, they'd want to know how you knew anything was wrong?"

"That's true!" muttered her lover. "But, Vivian, I've done nothing that I'm ashamed of."

"I believe you, Clyde, and that makes it easy. Just go about things in the regular way. Don't even worry. Go to your office to-morrow, as usual

"If any one comes there, and if they want to arrest you, make no fuss—go with them. Then, when they try to prove you've done wrong, they can't do it, because you haven't. When they find that out, it will be a good lesson for papa, too, maybe.

"He's so accustomed to having his own way in things that he gets angry whenever any one wants things differently. If he didn't love me so awfully much I'd have a hard time, too. Well, I must get back home, Clyde.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you papa went out that's how I got away. I saw him take a Devisadero cross-town car. But I'm afraid the housekeeper saw me leave, although she was very foxy and made a lot of noise when she went to her room."

"You'll be in the housekeeping line yourself, working for me, inside a month, unless I miss my guess, Vivian," laughed Clyde. "Then we'll give them the merry little hoot—"

"What do you mean, Clyde?"

He laughed recklessly.

"I'm going to pick out a lemon-colored limousine, one of these fine days, and furnish up a flat with a lot of *pâté de foies gras*, a piano, and a cardboard motto reading:

"'When in Doubt, Do It Differently!'

"You just wait, honey. We'll win, yet, and your papa will shake hands with me and say.

"'My boy, I didn't think you had it in you—I really didn't.'"

His optimism was so infectious that Vivian was entirely reassured. She pressed him for details, but he was obdurate, although very tender, when their farewell was said.

Vivian took a car on the Ellis and O'Farrel line, and Clyde, walking on air, turned back to Market Street. He was walking along, again glowing with his introspective visions, when he passed beneath a movie-theater awning and into the glare of its incandescents, announcing that "Adrift in a Great City, in Three Reels," was on exhibition.

"A few more reels won't make me any dizzier than what has happened, thus far to-day," he thought facetiously, as he tendered a dime at the ticket window.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MADMAN AT LARGE

"ADRIFT in a Great City," proved to be a very tame melodrama, with situations so flat by comparison with his own hectic day and evening, that Clyde, emerging after seeing the last reel, felt that he had been "jipped" of at least nine cents.

He lighted a cigar and was about to walk away, when a taxi drew up near him, disgorging two men. Their alert eyes scanned every one until they rested on the ad writer.

In the crowd now streaming out, Clyde could have evaded them easily. But mindful of Vivian's injunction and of the misinterpretation such an act would entail, he stood his ground.

"You're under arrest!" announced one of the men, as he reached his side.

The fact that he was no longer a free man, despite the ominous events of the earlier part of the evening as narrated by Vivian, was such a shock that Clyde Jones was incapable of any protest. Until the station was reached he maintained a silence as absolute as that of the detectives.

Once inside, after a perfunctory search, which revealed only the trivial amount of cash he had with him, a pocket-knife, a fountain pen, and the keys to his hotel room and his office, Clyde was turned over to a turnkey with the usual formal questions regarding his name, residence, *et cetera*.

He turned to the man at the desk

"What am I charged with?" he asked.

"Nothing, yet."

"Nothing?" echoed the prisoner. "Well, I object to being locked up—"

"Come on none of your nonsense, now," said the turnkey, roughly.

Choking back his wrath and chagrin,

Clyde was led down-stairs. His knife, pen, and keys were kept at the desk. He was thrust into a cell and left to his thoughts.

They were not pleasant. But, although it was his first experience of the kind, the prisoner much preferred communion with himself to mingling with the other unfortunates in the place, many of whom were ribald and noisy, or to conversation with the uncivil turnkey.

He had committed no crime. Indignation and consciousness of his innocence, however, could not lighten his sense of the dismal and depressing surroundings, and he cogitated the bitter fact that it is not always the wrong-doer who suffers

He concluded that the lateness of the hour was one reason why he had not been formally charged, and after pacing the narrow cell for a long time, finally fell into a troubled sleep. Morning brought no change, save a new turnkey in the corridor and an opportunity to purchase breakfast from an adjacent restaurant, instead of eating the unsavory mess provided by the municipality.

When the food was brought, he paid for it and gave the surly waiter a dime. In return, he was given a badly crumpled newspaper.

This he opened, partially through force of habit, for he invariably read a morning paper at breakfast, and partly to shake off the forebodings that obsessed him on waking to find himself in durance certainly vile.

The first head-lines he saw drove all thoughts of food to the antipodes.

## MADMAN AT LARGE.

### Eludes Sanatorium After Visit from Alleged Confederate Who Provides Funds, It Is Thought.

Harold Chanley, a brilliant and versatile man, but certified as hopelessly insane by several alienists, including Dr. Philip Fenway, superintendent of the San Pablo Sanatorium, yesterday took French leave of his place of detention in a manner so mysterious as to baffle for several hours those having him in charge. The escape is said to have been engineered through a visitor who chatted with Chanley just prior to his disappearance. this man, like the lunatic, had yellow hair, but there are no other points of resemblance, the authorities say. He is from San Francisco, his name and address are known; but his name is withheld by the police, who admit, however, that they were looking for him last night after his return Although his arrest was said by members of Captain Kelly's staff to be imminent, neither he nor the escaped lunatic had been taken into custody at the hour of going to press.

"Thanks for small favors," muttered the most interested reader in the Bay Cities, as he continued to scan the article. "Holding out my name helps a little. No wonder they didn't book me. They're still looking for Chanley.

"I wonder how he managed it? Well, I'll find out when they take me into court and charge me with aiding him, for, of course, that's what they 'll do."

Just how Chanley managed to leave the institution, hitherto deemed so secure, it is impossible to say. All that could be learned from the institution over the phone last night was that the visitor who is suspected of aiding Chanley was passed out of the institution in the regular way by an attendant authorized to do so by Dr Fenway in person, whom, it seems, accompanied him inside, and introduced him to Chanley.

The last seen of Chanley he was in the yard with this visitor. They talked together for a long time. Then the visitor hurriedly left In leaving, however, he had to pass through Dr. Fenway's private office. The superintendent, it seems, was found in a state of collapse on his desk, after Chanley's escape was discovered, about four o'clock, when the usual count of patients was made Dr Fenway has been unable to talk coherently since, and it is thought that he had been assaulted. Careful examination, however, fails to disclose any trace whatever of a physical injury.

The station-agent at San Pablo avers that he saw the visitor running to catch the up bound Del Monte Limited just as that train was arriving. He did not see any one else around the station, either then or later Chanley, therefore, seems to have vanished into thin air, and the entire country is being searched for him

The presumption of guilty knowledge on the part of the alleged confederate, the police say, is heightened by the fact that he was not only the last man seen with Chanley, with whom he appeared to be on terms of extreme intimacy, but also from the fact that

after his return from the city, late last night, he received a telephone call, after which he left his office, just before police officers arrived to interrogate him. This call, it is pointed out, may have come from Chanley, as the suspect went out of the building in no small perturbation, hired a taxi, and immediately disappeared. The police subsequently located the taxi driver; but, as stated, the suspect had eluded them until a late hour.

Clyde folded the paper and put it in his pocket. The reason for his arrest appeared to be that he was charged with complicity in Chanley's escape. But, if this were really, why hadn't the police arrested him?

He understood, perfectly, why they had called up the residence of Jacob Holmes—or, at least, he thought he did. Vivian had hinted that her father had seen him on the return trip.

He hadn't seen Jacob Holmes, chiefly owing to his absorption in Chanley's really stupendous idea—the idea which he had set in motion the moment he returned to his office.

"Of course," he cogitated, "the moment Chanley was found to be missing they had a very natural impression that I had something to do with it. But Jacob Holmes having seen me, as well as the agent and the trainmen, all of whom know I was the only man to get on at San Pablo, must know that I didn't leave the sanatorium with Chanley.

"A man is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty. If they have any proof, why don't they take me into court?"

It was now well along toward midforenoon. The fact that he had not yet been arraigned argued that the police had no real case, and this comforted him mightily.

Once more he began picking up the threads to try to reason out the why and how of his arrest. It did not seem hard.

"Jacob Holmes is a director of a whole lot of things, including the railroad," Jones argued to himself. "Hence, he'd be known to the conductor, as he undoubtedly travels on a pass. When they tried to find out if Chanley had taken the same train with me, they undoubtedly communicated with Nelson Robinson—let's see—yes, he lives somewhere in Fruitvale.

"He'd remember me, of course. I was without a nickel and told him so. The Pullman conductor has my watch.

"I didn't discover I was without funds until I got on the train. I gave Robinson my name and address—but he didn't take it, and I don't think the Pullman conductor took it, either—for, by Jove, I forgot to take his name and address.

"Well, that's really no matter. Robinson knows it. But, since my irascible prospective father-in-law saw me, and they knew he saw me, they tipped the police off to call him up and that's why those cops came down to the office, after Vivian phoned to me."

Jones smiled to himself. If that alibi wasn't bomb-proof, then none that he could have devised would have cleared him.

The fact that Jacob Holmes disliked him intensely was a factor making for his safety; and when added to the weight of evidence given by the trainmen, there could be only one result—exoneration. His paucity of funds would show his innocence, for conspirators do not as a rule go into plots without ample resources.

Luck was still with him. His name hadn't been compromised, as yet, by being brought into the mess, and, now that the big idea was launched, he was very grateful for that. Otherwise, when he was ready for his grand *coup d'état*, prejudice might upset his cherished plans.

To while away the tedious hours, Jones borrowed a lead pencil from the turnkey and drafted other phases of his big idea on the margins of the newspaper. After he had firmly fixed the nebulous thoughts in concrete form and tested them, he committed them to memory and carefully destroyed the memoranda.

Noon came and passed. The afternoon waned. Despite his optimistic visions, the oppressive character of his surroundings began to pall on the ad writer.

Finally he was moved to ask the turnkey why he had not been taken to court. That official consulted his slate.

"You're held on the secret blotter," he announced, "which means that nothing will be done in your case for forty-eight hours, probably. After that they've got to take you to court."

"That's outrageous," said Clyde.

The turnkey grinned.

"So I understand," said he, "but, me lad, they pay me for kapin' an eye on youse just the same. You can sue 'em for false imprisonment after the judge turns you out of the coop, maybe."

Just how he passed the long evening, the interminable hours before sleep again came to his eyes, and another equally bitter forenoon, Clyde Jones did not know. But, all things have an end at last.

It was about eleven o'clock the following day when one of the men who had brought him in came over to the cell door.

"Well, Chanley," said he, jocosely, "they'll be after you from the asylum, to-morrow. Tough luck, old man. But how did you get your whiskers off so quick? And how did you get out of there and down here?

Jones stared at him. A horrible, nauseating feeling spread from the pit of his stomach over him.

He divined, now, the reason why he had not been formally arraigned for the alleged complicity in aiding the lunatic's escape.

But that was a patent absurdity. Even Judkins would know the difference the moment he clapped eyes on Jones. There was only one point of similarity between him and the escaped man—they both had yellow hair.

Chanley was about his height, but heavier, and his features were regular while Jones had a nose which had never been normal since his football days in high school.

He gripped the bars and replied:

"Where do you get that stuff? I'm not Chanley. You've pulled a fine bone. Take me up to Captain Kelly, and be quick about it, or you'll go back among the goats when the truth about your blundering gets out—and I'm not sure you won't go, anyway!"

## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE WEB

THE idiosyncrasies of a lunatic are proverbial.

The detective who had been one of the two effecting the arrest turned to the turnkey with a superior smile.

"He didn't claim to be the Czar, or nothing like that, did he, Tom?"

"No, Jack. But he did ask me why they didn't take him to court."

"They don't take escaped lunatics to court—or escaped convicts, either," sententiously returned the man addressed as Jack. "Not when they crush out.

"All the police has to do is to hold 'em until somebody comes to take 'em back. Chanley, you're a smart fellow—but you're a nut, too, or you wouldn't have come down here—"

"You'll never be a nut, as you term it," observed Clyde witheringly. "Nuts have meat inside of them. Your head is full of Swiss cheese, and I can prove it."

The inelegant but otherwise snappy rejoinder seemed to get under the hide of the man called Jack. He flushed.

"How?" he challenged.

"Why," jeered Jones, "it's a cinch. You never saw Chanley in your whole blundering life. If you had ever seen him, you would not make such an egregious mistake as to think I looked like him.

"The only possible point of resemblance between us is that we both have yellow hair. You're one of these people that take a whole lot for granted—but you'll wake up to-morrow, when the asylum attendant gets here and shows you up for a cheap, egotistical idiot."

"Idiot?" gasped the other, with a truculent frown.

"Captain Kelly will probably add a few adjectives," went on Jones caustically, "when the facts get to him. And they'll get to him—you can gamble on that—the moment the asylum people get here.

"You call yourself a detective! I don't think you could detect a bad odor—or you wouldn't lock up a business man for more than thirty-six hours, just because a lunatic you've never seen escapes from an asylum a hundred miles away—and I'll lay you three to one you've never seen the asylum, either."

In sheer disgust he turned away and began to pace the cell.

It was a piece of official impertinence

without parallel, Jones told himself, and he would see to it that the men responsible were given their just deserts.

His temper was ugly. He dared not trust himself to even look at the fellow who had been the cause of this cruel and careless incarceration, and he sat down on the edge of the bunk in a very savage mood, while the turnkey and Jack withdrew out of earshot

Jack went out of the corridor, and presently the turnkey was back at Clyde's cell. The occupant ignored him. Having been a newspaperman before he embarked on the career of a purveyor of publicity, he knew something of police methods—the futility of an appeal when the cards were stacked, and the spurious character of alleged sympathy when some blunder is sought to be covered up or condoned.

"If your name isn't Chanley, what is it?"

Jones sneered.

"I'm not in the habit of discussing my affairs with subordinates," was his cutting rejoinder, "and, if you'll think back a bit, you'll remember you told me you were paid to keep me here, when I spoke of my detention as outrageous, after inquiring when I'd be taken to court."

"So ye did, my lad; so ye did. And, believe me or not, I just told Jack McGee that he'd got the wrong pig by the ear, or I was a nut meself. You hit him hard when you told him he'd never seen Chanley."

"Your blarney don't interest me," said Jones savagely. "You're a turnkey, aren't you? Well, I'm a citizen and a man of big affairs—as will come out to-morrow. The longer I stay in here, the more damages I'll get especially after I've told the man who arrested me that I was not Chanley. You can come into court and testify to that, too, when the time comes."

His uncompromising attitude evidently had its effect. The turnkey disappeared. Presently both men who had arrested him were back at his cell door, and it was unlocked.

"Captain Kelly wants to see you," said McGee's partner.

"Thanks," dryly retorted Jones, as he went up-stairs to the office of the individual named.

Captain Kelly was a grizzled veteran of the police business, gruff and reputed to be "hard." But he was also just. He waved the prisoner to a chair.

Jones took it, and looked him straight in the eye

"I understand you claim you're illegally detained," he began.

"You are correctly informed."

Jones shot over his tart reply in style not unlike the manner in which a champion lightweight counters to his antagonist's head while blocking the other's lead.

Kelly, however, vented a snort of disgust.

"Chanley, the jig is up What's the use of this bluffing?"

"You're the one that's bluffing. My name is Clyde Jones."

The official leaned back wearily.

"All right, Chanley. But you can't prove it."

"Not locked up, *incommunicado*, down in one of those vile cells—no."

"Well, there may be something in that, too," said Kelly thoughtfully. "If a mistake has been made, I want to get it righted. What do you want me to do?"

"Did you ever see Chanley?"

"No."

"Did either of these men ever see him?"

They shook their heads. Both looked rather uncomfortable, too.

"What else, Mr. Jones?" asked Kelly.

"Not so much," said the victim; "but, because I was born with yellow hair, that's no sign I've got to take another man's place in a madhouse, is it?"

"No. But how did this mix-up occur?"

"I went to San Pablo and visited the sanatorium. I met Chanley. Dr. Fenway took me through the place. He spoke of this brilliant man, and when we came to the harmless ward he introduced me to him. He left to go through another part of the institution, and I had quite a talk with Chanley. He's got a phenomenal mind.

"When the attendant passed me out, I spoke to the doctor, and left, as the train was nearly due. On the train, I found that Chanley had pilfered my money. All I

had was a ten-dollar bill and some change when I arrived at San Pablo. The bill was gone. So, to get back, I offered the train conductor my watch as security for my fare."

"So I understand," said Kelly affably. "Well, anything more?"

"Nelson Robinson, the conductor, told me he'd advance my fare. I insisted, however, on giving him my watch. It turned out that he was a little short of cash, and I gave it instead to the Pullman conductor, who paid for my ticket and Pullman as well."

"What was his name?"

"I overlooked asking it at the time. But, Conductor Robinson called him 'Sam,' and probably knows who he is and where he lives."

Kelly looked out of the window. "Anything else, Mr. Jones?"

"I went to my office, No. 77 Portala Building, and wrote a business letter, which I mailed, special delivery. The carbon copy is on my desk—or should be, as I left it there. Then I paid a social call on a friend, went to the theater, was arrested, and you know where I've been ever since."

"Well, all that goes to prove that you're Chanley, not Jones, don't it? We knew all that before. That's why we're holding you."

"I can't pretend to understand why you make such a statement."

"You said you gave the conductor your watch?"

"The Pullman conductor."

"What kind of a watch?"

Jones described the make, case, number of jewels; and Kelly noted it all down, with the resigned air of one who is merely humoring one of disordered mind.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"The trainmen I've mentioned can confirm my story and will probably recognize me, if you care to send for them."

"I've already sent for them. Sergeant"—Kelly turned to one of the men—"go out and see if Conductor Robinson and Conductor Brown have come."

The officer returned with the information that both were outside.

"Send Mr. Robinson in."

Jones leaned back in his chair. His belligerent attitude had brought him thus far, and for the life of him he could not see how he could be held any longer on the flimsy pretext of being a man he did not resemble, save in one slight particular, after Robinson and Brown completed the inevitable identification.

On the other hand, he could not understand the curious complacency either of the men who had brought him in or their superior. They should have evinced a little doubt, at least, as to their ability to make good on an identification they had taken for granted all along, whereas all three of them seemed to be awaiting the issue with a marked, even nefarious, air of certainty.

The door opened, and Robinson entered.

"Mr. Robinson," said Kelly, "have you ever seen this man before?" He waved toward Jones, whom the conductor scrutinized.

"Yes, sir."

"When and where?"

"On the up-bound Del Monte Limited, three days ago."

"Where did he get on your train?"

"At San Pablo"

"Did he have a ticket?"

"No, sir. He just reached the station in time to board us."

The details of Clyde's tender of the watch were duly given, and then Robinson withdrew.

The Pullman conductor came in next. It gratified the ad-writer to note his identification was equally simple; and Mr. Brown's admission that the prisoner had given him a watch seemed to remove the last residuum of possible doubt.

"Where is that watch now?" queried Captain Kelly.

"I don't know, sir. I gave it to these gentlemen," returned the Pullman conductor, indicating McGee and his partner, "the night they came to my house looking up this passenger."

"We turned it over to the property clerk, captain," said McGee, with an air of spurious humility which was not lost on Jones.

"Take Mr. Brown out and have him examine it," directed Kelly. "If it is the same watch, have it brought here."

McGee disappeared with Brown. They came back presently with the timepiece. Jones, however, did not even look toward them.

The thing was over, as far as he was concerned, for his story had been positively confirmed in every detail.

"Is this the watch, Mr. Brown?" asked Kelly, taking it

"Yes, captain."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Brown. You may go. We won't need you nor Conductor Robinson again."

As the door closed behind the departing man, Kelly turned to Clyde.

"You described your watch to me a moment ago, didn't you?"

"I certainly did. Why?"

Kelly did not reply in words. Instead, he passed over the timepiece. Jones took it. His first glance utterly demolished his hope of release.

The watch was more unlike his own than he was unlike the superlunatic whom the blundering police insisted he was. It was of Swiss manufacture instead of American, and it had appurtenances that Jones had never seen on a timepiece.

Moreover, on the back of the hunting-case, was engraved the name "Jeremiah Judkins," in neat Roman lettering. Instead of his alibi extricating him, Clyde's assertions had only involved him the more.

McGee, also, seemed rather more than pleased when Kelly said gruffly: "Take him down stairs, Jack."

"Just a moment, please, captain," said Jones. "Until now I had no idea that I had not given my watch to that gentleman. But the fact that I gave another don't prove I'm Chanley—it proves that Chanley probably lifted my watch as well as my money, and slipped this one into my pocket. I remember now that I didn't look at it when I gave it to the Pullman conductor, as I was rather up in the air over the loss of my money."

"Very clever, Chanley, but you ought to have thought of it before I nailed you. You didn't know the police department had traced the watch or had it, did you?"

Clyde did know the police had been tracing his movements; but he couldn't afford to admit it, because that would have involved Vivian. So he merely held his tongue.

"And another thing, Chanley," went on the police official. "You didn't have any intention of redeeming that watch, or else you would have taken the name and address of the Pullman conductor. That watch is good for a hundred-dollar loan in any pawn-shop. You didn't care for that—you wanted to get to San Francisco."

"Rot!" exploded Jones. "Why, there are fifty men who know me—right here in town. You're only piling up future humiliation for yourself, captain. I'll admit there are unforeseen angles to this mix-up; but I still insist that if Chanley was here, alongside of me, any one who'd ever seen him would know that I do not even remotely resemble him—except that we both have yellow hair.

"Now, I'm tired of being unjustly confined; and some one's going to pay for this unless I'm immediately released."

Kelly flushed. The threat of a suit, however, and the uncompromising attitude of the man in custody inclined him to caution.

"Give me the name of one man in town who knows that you're the man you claim to be," said Kelly after a moment of reflection. "If he's a citizen of standing, I'll accept that and release you with our apologies."

"You're on. Call the office of Jacob Holmes. He knows me," flashed Jones.

Kelly pulled the receiver from his desk-phone without comment.

"He's not at his office nor at his house," he announced after a lapse of five minutes. "His secretary says he went to attend a meeting of directors, but that he was called out, and he doesn't know where to get in touch with him now."

"Thank you," said Jones. "While we're on this topic, captain, I'd like to state that I bank at the Orient Trust Company, also."

"Want me to call them up?"

"Not to tell them that I'm in a cell," said Jones with a wry smile, "or that I'm a suspected lunatic. I'd rather the bank

didn't know of my temporary difficulties. But if you still think I'm not the man I claim to be—"

"I've got to be shown," said Kelly.

"Then I'll also suggest this," supplemented the prisoner casually. "That you call up my bank and ascertain the amount of my balance. I'll tell it to you, here and now. That ought to show that I'm not Chanley."

"Well, it might show you knew how much Jones's account was," admitted Kelly, "and I'm willing to take a chance that far. How much was it?"

Jones leaned forward. He was very eager to get out of this enforced and altogether absurd situation without a moment's delay. So much depended on his following up the "big idea" that his eagerness was almost hectic.

"Two hundred and seven dollars and eighty-nine cents," said he emphatically.

Kelly made a painstaking note of the amount before calling the bank, revealing his name, office, and other details before putting the question. Even then there was a certain hesitancy at the other end of the wire, and he snapped, "Police business," while Jones, on edge, waited.

Then he hung up.

"They're going to call back to me," said he grimly. "Wouldn't take my word. But—well, here's a ring now."

"Yes, this is Captain Kelly. Yes, I just called you. I understand. How much? Thank you very much."

He turned to the prisoner.

"You're sure that figure you gave me is right?"

"Positive, captain."

"You haven't put in any money lately?"

"How could I, when I've been locked up since I got back from San Pablo, during banking hours?"

"It was your own idea," said Kelly grimly, "not mine. The Orient Trust Company say that you have more than two thousand dollars to your credit. Can you account for the eighteen hundred difference?"

Jones was so astounded that he could only shake his head. There must be some mistake," he said weakly.

"I'd like to have it happen to my bank-account," retorted Kelly. "Well, Chanley, you're supposed to be nutty about money, anyway, aren't you? Always filling in checks on banks? Wasn't it that trick that landed you in the asylum?"

"But I tell you that I'm not Chanley."

"I know you say it. But Mr Holmes will know, won't he?"

"He surely will."

"I'll take his word," said Kelly, "because I always keep my own, and I said I would before you started this last bluff. The minute I can get in touch with him I'll ask him to come down here and look you over. Until then I've got to send you down-stairs again."

Clyde had no option. Again behind the bars, he reflected that it was quite probable that Mr. Holmes had been attending a meeting of the directors of the Welcome Blend Coffee Company—the same people with whom Jones had hoped to land the big idea—and he shook his head at the noxious delay, for it meant a serious impairment of his plan—which had been to go down and clean up with them, face to face, as Chanley had suggested.

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE MAN WHO DOES.

As his secretary had informed Captain Kelly, the sagacious, pugnacious, and affluent Jacob Holmes had gone to attend a meeting of a board of directors; and, as Jones had also surmised, it happened to be that of the coffee concern

But several things were even then happening of which neither Captain Kelly, Mr. Holmes, or even the unlucky ad-writer had the slightest idea. The inception of them came in the directors' meeting, some ten blocks from where Jones was immured.

Holmes was a rather heavy stockholder in the coffee company, and dividends during the past quarter had not been up to expectations. Therefore he sat a grim and frowning figure during the reading of the reports, along with six other hard-shell business men, among whom were the president, secretary, and treasurer.

When the routine business had been concluded, and the chairman of the board put the usual stereotyped inquiry, "Is there any new business to come before the board?" Mr. Holmes cleared his throat, and in a rather brusk fashion proceeded to deliver himself of a few corrosive remarks about the lack of pep which the concern was showing in going after business.

Ensued a wrangle of some half an hour, at the end of which Mr. Holmes was still of the same opinion—that they had better "go get 'em," though he did not say just who—and his chief protagonist was equally of the opinion that "something ought to be done," while he challenged Jacob Holmes to chart the route by which the haven of bigger dividends would be speedily reached.

Just here the secretary spoke:

"Here is some correspondence which has come in the past two days. It's rather unique, and perhaps merits the attention of the board, providing we can ascertain who sent it, and why."

He picked up the first letter which Clyde Jones had sent, attached to which was a ten-dollar bill, and began to read the communication

"GENTLEMEN:

The attached ten-dollar bill is to pay for your time in reading my letter.

I want to know why you have been so remiss in allowing me to drink inferior coffee for two years past, when I might have been imbibing your Welcome Blend, which I lately discovered purely by accident

I consider that you have treated me most unfairly

What's the idea, anyway?

Don't you want people to drink Welcome Blend?

If not, why do you put it up?

Are you ashamed of the fact that it's fresh, palatable, energizing, and, compared with other stale, inferior decoctions masquerading as coffee, it's fit for the gods?

Do you drink Welcome Blend yourselves?

Don't you want other people to drink it, the same as THE MAN WHO DOES."

There was a ripple of laughter at the pungent communication and a volley of questions.

"Who is 'The Man Who Does'?"

"I haven't been able to find out," explained the secretary. "These letters are all written on plain paper, sent to us in a plain envelope, always by special delivery, and each one of them has money in it. I'll read the second one:

"GENTLEMEN:

The enclosed twenty-dollar bill is to pay you for reading my second letter

When I accidentally discovered Welcome Blend, it was a big thing for me.

Evidently you've never discovered Welcome Blend yourselves, or, if you have, the discovery petrified you, because other people have never learned what I know about it.

If they had learned about it, they would be drinking Welcome Blend, the same as I am drinking it.

Possibly you're too busy in the buying and blending of coffee to appreciate Welcome Blend

Or maybe you merely think you're "too busy," which amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?

Ostensibly, you're in the coffee business

Actually, you're in a rut!

A rut is like a grave. It's shallower It's narrower

But it's as long as life, generally.

How long is your rut, and how long will you stay in it?

Why don't you get out of it?

Why don't you drink Welcome Blend like

THE MAN WHO DOES"

"By gad," exclaimed the chairman of the board, "I'd like to meet the man who wrote those letters! I wonder where he hangs out, and who he is?"

"So would I?" echoed Jacob Holmes. "Can't we find him?"

"That's the funny part of it," said the secretary. "He doesn't use a letterhead, there's no address, phone number, or clue of any kind—save the post-marks, and they are all different. But listen to No. 3 letter, which came early this morning:

"GENTLEMEN:

I enclose a fifty-dollar bill to pay you for reading my third letter about Welcome Blend

Did you ever pay as much to tell people how good it was as I'm paying you to discover its superiority?

You never did You probably never will, for you would regard that as idiotic prodigality—an error of a disordered mind, and one to be never repeated

However, I've made another discovery.

Welcome Blend Coffee is superlatively delicious for two reasons:

First, it's balanced to an exquisite nicety

Second, it's always fresh.

Get that *-Fresh!*

You don't eat addled eggs, or stale bread, or putrid meat, or decayed vegetables. They must all be *fresh.*

Then why should any one drink coffee that's lost its aroma and flavor, because coffee deteriorates rapidly after roasting?

Why should people living in the Bay Cities drink inferior coffee, when they might drink Welcome Blend like

THE MAN WHO DOES."

"He's right!" said Jacob Holmes. "Boys, we're a bunch of muttonheads. That fellow's got more sense in his noodle than all of us. Is there another letter, Mr. Secretary?"

"It arrived just as we went into session. I haven't opened it yet."

Suiting the action to the word, he slit the envelope. Clearing his throat, he read, amid a tense but respectful silence:

"GENTLEMEN,

The enclosed one-hundred-dollar bill is to pay you for reading the attached letter.

You're busy men. Busy blending Welcome Blend.

I'm a busier man. Busy getting money for people, who can't or won't get it for themselves.

You think you're in the coffee business to make money.

Wake up. If you really made money, you'd land in prison or an insane asylum.

Only criminals nowadays try to *make* money.

Every one tries to *get* money. Prudent people try to get it in return for something useful, instructive, or edifying that they furnish other people.

Coffee is such a commodity. Welcome Blend is a peerless coffee.

Every one in the Bay Cities out to know about it and drink it.

They might, and probably would, but for your persistent obstinacy.

This is San Francisco, gentlemen—not Timbuktu.

In Timbuktu the natives could sell Welcome Blend the same way you try to sell it here.

Occasionally some one would accidentally discover its merits, if they waited long enough—just as I discovered it here.

But if it isn't worth your while to help tens of thousands of coffee drinkers in this locality to discover Welcome Blend, is it worth while for me to spend any more money writing letters to a firm that hasn't yet discovered itself?

I wonder. I'll continue to wonder until two o'clock this afternoon. Then I'll cease wondering, and come to your office in person to find out.

Meanwhile, gentlemen, if you still insist on people in the Bay Cities drink coffee as aged as the Pyramids, I shall, nevertheless, continue to champion freshness and purity; and extol Welcome Blend as the most excellent exponent of those qualities, plus an individual flavor so marked that it has led me to exhibit such excessive enthusiasm in this brief and one-sided correspondence.

Why not, gentlemen, let a million other coffee drinkers on the doorstep of your factory drink Welcome Blend like

THE MAN WHO DOES."

The secretary laid down the last letter.

Jacob Holmes eyed the four missives with an avid gaze.

"Great grief!" said he. "If that kind of a man ever went over with our competitors, we might as well go into voluntary bankruptcy!"

Then the telephone bell rang.

The secretary passed the receiver to the magnate. He listened for an instant. His face grew taut and rigid.

"Yes, Mrs. McReynolds," said he, "I understand. "Yes. I'll take action at once."

He hung up.

"Gentlemen," said he, "business of an imperative and private nature makes it impossible for me to remain longer. If 'The Man Who Does' comes in, and makes any kind of a business proposition that looks good, and you vote on it, vote 'yes' for me, please. I'll leave my proxy with the secretary, with that understanding."

"He should be here in twenty minutes," said the chairman. "Can't you wait that long, Mr. Holmes? He listens good at long range. Wouldn't you like to interview him?"

"Not," said the irascible director, "until I've interviewed another presumptuous young scalawag that's just carried off my daughter in a yellow automobile with red wheels. But I'll back the man who wrote that series of letters in an independent coffee company if some of you fellows get cold feet. He's a live wire—and a dynamo, too."

He bolted incontinently, in a frame of

mind best described as one of "high dudgeon" at his fellow members of the board no less that at the individual he had mentioned who had caused him to leave.

The board remained in continuous session when he had gone. To pass the time, the secretary was instructed to enter the parting remarks of Mr. Holmes on the minutes of the meeting, thus providing a permanent record of his sentiments, in case they wished to take action during his absence.

When this had been done, and the minutes read and approved, six watches flashed amid a silence that was eloquent with expectation.

"It is now three minutes to two," said the chairman.

They looked at each other rather sheepishly. The correspondence was decidedly unconventional in tone; the criticisms it voiced were rather caustic—but the logic of the situation was tacitly acknowledged by all of them, especially when the door opened, and a diminutive colored factotum brought in a huge card, bearing the legend in letters eight inches high:

**THE MAN WHO DOES**

"Send him in," directed the chairman.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A BUSINESS PROPOSITION.

THE order was unnecessary. The eccentric tenor of the correspondence was emphasized by the manner of entrance of the individual who next appeared. He reached over the shoulder of the colored youth, seized the card, pushed the boy out of the way, advancing down the room to the long table while carefully shielding his face with the huge pasteboard.

When quite close to the six hard-shell business men he lowered it. This action revealed a medium-sized man of uncertain age, rather regular features smoothly shaved and adorned with an engaging smile, while his intellectual forehead was thatched with hair the hue of freshly-threshed wheat straw.

"Well, gentlemen," he began without preliminary, "a little lunacy now and then is relished by the wisest men. At the outset of this our first, and possibly our only, conference I must insist that you regard me as not normal."

"What do you mean?" asked the chairman.

"My methods prove me mad—but the point is this: Do I go back to some asylum, or visit your bank with a certified check? Checks, I may say, are practically a mania with me.

"I've been filling out checks daily for a long, long time, and for various amounts. The only cure for this form of hallucination is to have some one else fill out a check for you—and I trust you are already inclined in that direction."

He paused and looked them over with a bland smile.

The president of the board put a question:

"May I ask your name?"

"I'd rather remain incognito, for the present," suavely returned the visitor. "My name isn't important. It could never interest you as much as your coffee might interest people who've never tasted it up to this moment

"My time is limited, for the reason—and I state it with all due and becoming modesty—that I'm a much-sought-after man. But that isn't of interest to you, either.

"The interesting thing to both you and me is this: "How much coffee can you put up like Welcome Blend? How much can you distribute to the people of the Bay Cities where they can get it conveniently, and when they want it? And, also, how long will it take you to find out?

"The last is very important, gentlemen, for I cannot possibly spare more than fifteen minutes. However, while you're thinking those questions over, I'll use a bit of the time in telling you that I've just been around the world with Welcome Blend, and that the reception accorded me was most

gratifying. In Persia, for instance, I met some of the dignitaries—"

He paused. They leaned forward, intent on every syllable

The visitor fixed them with a merry eye and intoned:

"The vizier proud, with a low salaam,
Presents to the Shah a telegram.
It's not the end of an old time friend—
But tells of a shipment of Welcome Blend"

He suddenly reversed the monstrous visiting card. They laughed like pleased boys. Blazoned across the top of the card was the legend:

**AROUND THE WORLD WITH WELCOME BLEND**

Below, at the left, was a water-color sketch of the monarch on his throne, with the minor official humbly presenting a message. To the right of this the jingle, and below, a coffee-colored container with what appeared to be a clock-face on the top of it. "Get it Everywhere" completed the illustrations.

There was a subdued but plainly audible ripple of approval.

"In Labrador, for instance," continued the eccentric visitor:

"Amid the blizzards and the gales,
Or polar bear, or seals, or gales—
The Eskimo, a jolly lubber,
Drinks Welcome Blend while he eats blubber."

And, without any delay:

"The jolly Queen of Madagascar
Would say, if you could only ask her,
Each subject now is her good friend
Since they've been drinking Welcome Blend"

He paused to extract a plain, hunting-case watch of American make from his pocket, which he snapped open.

"How fast time flies when one is traveling! Gentlemen, I fear I am too near my self-imposed limit to take you farther at this time. But please note the clock-face on top of this coffee-colored container. This is the soon-to-be-celebrated 'Time-Lock' for Welcome Blend. It absolutely prevents any future patron of yours from getting stale coffee. We'll trade-mark the idea.

"Very simple. Merely a printed label, saying: 'This coffee cannot be sold after 6 P.M. on the —— day of ——.' We fill in the blank with a rubber stamp, when filling the container, for two weeks ahead."

The chairman frowned. "But that's going to make a big loss. What do you do with the unsold coffee?"

"There will be no unsold coffee. We merely supply the demand—and create the demand before we put out the coffee. That keeps Welcome Blend always fresh, delicious, palatable.

"Coffee is a paradoxical commodity, gentlemen. It improves with age until after it's roasted, then it deteriorates. The aromatic oils which give it flavor evaporate. But that, gentlemen, is our secret. May I offer you congratulations on discovering yourselves, shall we say?"

"Gentlemen, what is your pleasure?" asked the chairman.

"I have three minutes more," said their visitor, "and if you don't mind I'll wait outside until they expire."

He moved toward the door.

"Just wait a minute," said the treasurer. "How much will this cost us?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" reiterated the man who had asked.

"Eventually, no. Your original investment will be ten thousand dollars. That gives you the exclusive use of the time-lock idea for California, and pays for drawings, plates, poems, and the rest of it, including the fascinating journey around the world, besides a series of snappy 'Coffee Conversations' which go in each container, to make permanent purchasers of the first buyers.

"A cent a pound on the increased sales leaves you money in pocket—instead of out of it. Also, as it is axiomatic that the time of men of originality, perceptivity, and action is very valuable, I might add that after

the three minutes are up the price goes up a thousand dollars every minute."

He moved toward the door.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BACK TO SAN PABLO—NOT QUITE.

CAPTAIN KELLY failed to get in touch with Jacob Holmes until about nine o'clock the following morning. The turnkey reported that his prisoner had spent a rather restless night.

As soon as he could locate the magnate, Kelly said over the phone:

"Would you mind coming down here to identify a man who claims his name is Clyde Jones?"

"What's that?" countered the other sharply.

Kelly repeated the request

Holmes gave a bellow of indignation. "What did you arrest him for?"

"We picked him up, thinking he's Chanley, the escaped lunatic."

"Hurray! Where did you get that young lunatic and how did you know I was after him? I've had a whole private detective agency trying to locate him, since yesterday afternoon."

"They didn't have a chance," said Kelly, "because we picked him up three days ago."

"What?"

Kelly repeated the information.

"He says his name is Clyde Jones?" demanded the magnate.

"Yes. So he says. But I think he's an escaped lunatic from San Pablo, by the name of Chanley. Caught him twice—once on a watch he said he bought, which turned out to belong to the attendant that had him in charge—caught him again, yesterday, in another trap when—"

"Easy, easy, captain!" warned Holmes "The first thing you know I'll be getting rats in my own mouse-trap. You say you picked this chap up three days ago?

"Well, then, how could it be Clyde Jones, when that consummate young scoundrel eloped with my daughter, yesterday, in a big yellow automobile with red wheels?"

"Do you know it was Clyde Jones?"

"Do I know I'm alive? I know Jones. I chased him out of the house, a long time ago, and posted my housekeeper, Mrs. McReynolds, to keep an eye on my daughter. She followed her the other night and saw her meet Jones when I was out telephoning to two of your men that I'd seen him on the train coming down from San Pablo.

"Yesterday she followed my daughter to No. 77 Portala Building, where Jones has his office. They had a long confab, and ran away in that darn machine I've told you about.

"So, I guess, if it's all the same to you, I won't come down, captain. I've got troubles of my own. I'm trying to head off that elopement."

"Gentlemen to see you, captain, a Mr Judkins, from San Pablo. And he's looking for his watch, too, that he said this guy Chanley took."

"Pleased to meet you," said Kelly. "Well, get him out of here. He's had me up in the air for three days."

"Ain't he the deep un?" exclaimed the attendant. "Blarney, no end of it. 'E could talk the brass legs off an 'eathen idol. Lord bless you, if you listen to 'im, you'd never 'ave time to do anythink else.

"Well, capting, I'll take both the watch and Chanley, and be on my wye. Will you have 'im brought in, sir?"

Captain Kelly, having many other fish to fry, did not wait, after directing the prisoner to be turned over. The last modicum of doubt having been removed by the same man whom the prisoner insisted would know him made further pow-wows a mere waste of time.

Jones was brought in. He was haggard from loss of sleep, his eye was wild and his hands twitched

But he faced Judkins, hoping against hope. Surely the attendant would discern the blunder being made without his saying a word.

Judkins, however, was busy examining his lost timepiece. This completed, he flashed merely a perfunctory glance at Jones, without, however, evincing any special umbrage.

"Well, Chanley," began the attendant,

ponderously, as he blinked at the yellow shock of hair, "now you've 'ad your fling, I trust you'll go 'ome peaceable."

Jones regarded him with a certain malevolence. His hands clenched, but he remained obdurately silent.

Judkins came closer and he caught a whiff of the attendant's breath. It fairly reeked. Judkins had been having a "fling" all his own, evidently, for rum was rampant on his exhalations.

Likewise, he misinterpreted the other man's silence as due to obduracy.

"Well, then, 'ere goes," said he, handcuffing him before he could protest. "Good day, gentlemen."

In a waiting cab they were whirled to the Valencia Street Station. Jones promptly found himself installed in the smoker, nearest the window, at the forward end of the car. A somewhat narrower seat immediately opposite and facing them was immediately preempted by a Sicilian, carrying a battered telescope, which he hoisted to the hat-rack over the manacled man's head before seating himself.

The train left almost immediately, and Jones recalled, with a sinking heart, that he was on the same Del Monte Limited which had carried him to San Pablo, only three short days ago.

The hideous contrast between that trip and this one, brought about by a most preposterous sequence of events, was amplified by the vile cigarettes the Italian opposite him smoked when he was not swigging from a flask labeled "Santa Cruz."

They passed the first stop at San José. The Italian was growing more mellow. Jones, on the contrary, was seething with anger.

This semibarbaric creature was free. He, himself, was in close custody of the ponderous but alert Judkins, despite the other's negligent attitude.

Two more stops of the train and he would be at the gates of bedlam.

He closed his eyes, wearily. Reason seemed slipping from its throne. He could not think coherently.

Vivian, the big idea — everything — danced and pirouetted in a wild chaos. He could not, moreover, shut out the rank odor of the vile tobacco smoked by the Italian opposite, nor close his mind to the desolating sense of futility which the hideous prospect of an indeterminate confinement with lunatics entailed.

It dominated his conscious mind, for a time, to the exclusion of all other ideas. Then he felt a slight movement of his guardian, and through his half-opened lids, he saw the Italian proffer the flask.

"I'll 'ave just one 'elping," smiled Judkins, as he took a potation of such heroic dimensions that Jones marveled. However, even if Judkins should slumber—there was no "out" for his prisoner.

The trainmen knew their destination from the tickets. An attempt to elude the guard, although successful, would result only in his return by the vigilant railroad men; and, even if it did not, handcuffed as he was, what chance had he of eluding pursuit, returning to San Francisco, and establishing his identity?

Judkins returned the flask, smacking his lips.

The Sicilian made as if to proffer it to the prisoner.

"No!" said Judkins, tapping his head and allowing an expression of gentle commiseration to filter over his heavy face.

"Poor mans!" sibilated the Sicilian. He replaced the flask, but, almost at once, it reappeared and again he took a liberal drink.

Jones closed his eyes. Shortly after, he heard a gentle snore. He opened them to look at Judkins.

Passengers in adjoining seats were slyly smiling. The Italian, as well, gave a cunning leer, lurched as the train sped around a curve, and then began to sing.

Judkins gave another prodigious snore. As if in answer, the Italian raised his voice a trifle. Jones suddenly felt a thrill.

It grew as a sly wink came floating over, and, meanwhile, above the roar of the train he could barely distinguish the words of the singer:

"I'm only a bird in a gilded cage,
Not a beautiful sight to see.
I ought to be happy and free from care—
I'm not, though I seem to be."

Then, in the same melody of the ballad

that had once been a bread-winner for Fagin Orton, in the old burnt-cork days, Jones also heard:

"Ten minutes more Clyde. Then I'll get up to monkey with my telescope. That's your cue to duck out on the platform.

"When we make a stop that's not scheduled, get off on the left hand side and leg it through the woods. How do you like my *El Mano Nero* make-up? Ain't it a marvel?"

Jones grinned. Finally, the pseudo Sicilian leaned forward and poked Judkins with the flask. A sterterous snort was his only rejoinder.

When he at last, rose in his seat, Jones slid through the open door of the coach while the ubiquitous Chanley, in pawing his battered telescope out of the rack, fell sidewise and yanked the conductor's emergency valve down its full length.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CHANLEY EXPLAINS.

A LOW-HUNG, yellow sport-model car with carmine wheels flashed by a huge load of baled alfalfa dragged by two plodding horses, so close as to graze the harness on the nearest animal. It volleyed on, cut-open, shooting back of it a simoom of yellow dust as if intent only in stifling the driver's sulfurous fulminations for the next half mile.

"Blast that driver, he must be crazy!" ruminated the angry farmer as the machine shot on ahead, over a bridge and up a defile locally known as Groton's Gap.

It did not even slow down for twenty miles. Then the swarthy chauffeur turned to a manacled man in the rear seat, to whom a vivacious brunette with dreamy eyes and provocative lips was clinging, and remarked:

"Here we pause, by yon babbling brook, long enough to remove your manacles, Clyde, and also this spurious Sicilian sunburn. Then, I'm going to abandon you, quite soon, to far more formidable fetters —locked on for life, let's hope."

He drew up smartly at the place indicated, leaped back into the rear of the machine, produced a bit of twisted wire, and, after a little patient manipulation Clyde Jones was chafing his freed wrists.

Chanley held up the wire and beamed.

"What a homily one could extemporize around this," he exclaimed. "Of itself ductile, yet inert—nevertheless it can penetrate where our facile fingers cannot, and administer a hypodermic of hope in a dark, dark hour."

Clyde's chagrin and recent resentment fell from him, forever.

"What next, Harold?"

"A toast to Judkins. What a delightful old fat-head he is. Never guessed I had two bottles, both labeled the same.

"One containing Welcome Blend, the other filled with his favorite tipple, Santa Cruz rum, with a shot of added somnolence. He'll have a head like a toy balloon tomorrow."

He ran over to the stream and shoved his own cranium deliberately under the water. Emerging, he wiped the make-up from his face with a handkerchief, and came back to the machine, chuckling.

"Nor did you guess, Clyde," he rattled on, "that the remnants of a pound of pulverized Welcome Blend, which I found in your office when the scrubwoman was cleaning up—that's how I first got in, of course—would, when mixed with a jar of cold-cream provide such an excellent and deceptive cosmetic, did you?"

"There's a whole lot of things been coming off that I can't understand," smiled the ad writer. "Vivian tells me that you landed that Welcome Blend contract. I can't understand how you did that, any more than I can guess how you got out of the sanatorium, and I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"Dear boy, I was out of there before you were. Remember the grasshopper?"

"I'll never forget how Dr. Fenway collapsed when Mr. Coleoptera jumped into his whiskers. What was the matter with him?"

"Oh, he just thought he was having a hallucination, himself. You know, Clyde, all alienists are on mental rubber-ice—or think they are, which is the same thing. I

was all ready to vamose and had the programme begun, when you floated in with Fenway and tied it up into a hard knot.

"While Judkins was prancing around with what he thought was a snake hanging to him, Fagin Orton frisked his room, down the hall, and out of the trunk brought the watch, a pair of shears and a razor, with the usual appurtenances.

"So, I had Zubrowski hide them in the yard, and, when I left you, Zubrowski, who was once a champion barber, denuded me of any sign of beard in just four minutes.

"I walked back into the harmless ward, flashed your business card on Judkins, and was out and down the hall, while you were still waiting for the chief attendant at the other hall. I walked into Dr. Fenway's office, and after expressing my pleasure at his kindness, I sprang the same formula on him that you repeated, when you came through. It seems to have knocked him, cold, by what I read in the papers."

"Great grief!" exclaimed Jones. "But, the police—afterward—"

"Wrong, Clyde. I was ahead of you, all the time. Bought a ticket with that invaluable ten-dollar bill, and hopped the Del Monte Limited ahead of you.

"Forgive me, please, for stealing that, as well as substituting Judkins's watch for yours. Here's your time-dipper."

Clyde replaced it.

"I'll forgive you, Harold, but what made you get me into such a peck of trouble?"

"My dear Clyde, you are so delightfully matter-of-fact! Remember how I told you to your face that you were a typical 'Do-It-Now' boy?"

"Yes. But—"

"Dear old chap," beamed Chanley, "I had an inkling that, when the psychological moment came with that coffee concern you mentioned that you'd blow up! Well, that was another reason for my naughty, naughty behavior—I just couldn't resist the temptation to try my own 'prescription,' as you naively termed it, on them

"So, I went straight to your office after you came back from supper. I was in the hall when you got that phone message and hurried out."

"You were? But the police came there, didn't they?"

"The police?" scoffed Chanley. "Well, what of it, you ingenuous young idiot? Of course they came. But, the police aren't as much trouble as even one persistent mosquito, if you know how to handle them. I was busy in my—or your—office when they arrived, typing letters.

"They didn't know me—nor, as it turned out, you. They addressed me as 'Mr. Jones.' I invited them to have seats, gave them a cigar—and put myself entirely at their service.

"They inquired about my visit. I was candid with them—only, I told of our chat from your point of view, instead of my own."

"You had more nerve than I had. I beat it," admitted Jones.

"Well, I didn't beat it, as you phrase it—I just sat tight and beat them to the wallop, all the way. Of course, I equivocated. I denied giving up my—that is Judkins's—watch on the train, and produced the invaluable timepiece to prove it. Then, we phoned to the conductor—at my suggestion—who referred us to the Pullman conductor.

"He told about the watch, and when he mentioned the name on the back, I grabbed my head and said: 'Why, gentlemen, that's the name of the attendant in charge of the ward, where Chanley was confined.' Then I put one of the detectives on the telephone, and he mentioned Mr. Holmes.

"So I looked up that number, in your book, and when I saw he was a director of the Welcome Blend Coffee Company, I also nailed the whole works—so far as the police were concerned—by showing them I was working out the details of a big advertising contract for a concern in which Mr. Holmes was a financial power. They were very nice, after that."

"But," protested Clyde, "Judkins ought never to have mistaken you for me, this morning. It simply isn't on the cards."

"Dear old Judkins," rejoined the imperturbable Chanley, "was probably a bit woozy when he arrived. He don't get many trips, except when after me, and he likes his toddy.

"Besides, you've no idea how often he's found me, before this, for every now and again I sift out of San Pablo for what Judkins calls 'a fling.' However, Clyde, I would have come an awful cropper, and been nailed, ignominiously, had it not been for the little lady here. She saved the bacon for Welcome Blend—if I may mix the metaphor."

"I'd like to know the inside of that, too, if you don't mind," said the ad writer. "How did it happen that Vivian's father noted the difference between you and me?"

"Well, for one thing, he didn't see me. For another, it came about in a curious way. I was all ready to go down to harpoon those seven hard-shells, including your estimable future father-in law, but, mind you, I didn't know that Mr. Holmes was Vivian's papa. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been so sure of the game, for he, of course, knew you, although he didn't know that the Man Who Does was you."

"No, that's so."

"So," continued Chanley, rapidly, "I took precautions. Instead of firing those mysterious letters at them daily, I began volleying a trifle faster—a matter of temperament, too, as I was on rather thin ice as Jones.

"Needing money, I filled out the check for three thousand dollars, which Dr. Fenway gave me at San Pablo. Then, after a few attempts, I succeeded in imitating your signature as an endorsement. The morning after you were picked up, I sent this to the bank by a messenger-boy, with your bank-book, and a note asking credit for it; also a check for a thousand, drawn by me, also in your name, from your book.

"I hid out to see if it would work. It did. They like you at your bank, Clyde. Never let them know you didn't send in that phony check, for reasons that will develop, later."

Clyde frowned. Vivian, however, smiled.

"Then I paid five hundred on account of this rainbow-on-wheels, and went back to the office," continued Chanley. "All the time I was hanging over the abyss with fear that some friend of yours would drop in and nothing to hold on to but my mop of yellow hair.

"But I sent the letters, and got away with it, until yesterday. Then, the inevitable blow-off came. Believe me, Clyde, it was the best little blow-off that ever hit yours truly. And Vivian must tell you about that."

Her lover turned to the girl on the back seat. Her face took on a charming tint and she cuddled close to him.

"I just couldn't stay away, Clyde, and went down to the office to give you a surprise. And that old termagant, Mrs. McReynolds, followed me.

"I didn't know it until I got inside and threw my arms around his—I mean your—neck. Then I—I kissed you I mean him, before I saw who it was!"

"Give it back –immediately," demanded Clyde, peremptorily. Vivian did, while Chanley slid back into the front seat and pressed the starter button.

"Well, Harold," said Jones, blithely, "I guess I owed you that one. Then, what happened, next?"

"The truly estimable Mrs. McReynolds let out a yip that reminded me of Zubrowski, when Judkins comes to give him his medicine," continued the narrator, "only Zubrowski don't wear a Turkish rug that he thinks looks like a wig. Mrs. McReynolds, unfortunately, does. In her perturbation, she disengaged it. Can you imagine a Jack Rose, in skirts, Clyde?

"Fortunately, the lemon-colored touring-car was in front of the building. We retired, at once, to previously prepared positions and I started for the coffee company, with Vivian.

"Then, she recognized me as not being an all-wool, warranted-not-to-rip-or ravel 'Do-It-Now' boy. But, after we got things calmed down, she sat like a good sport in the car, while I went in to harpoon the hard-shells with the Mother-Goose stuff, and she's got their check, for ten thousand dollars, to your order, Clyde, pinned over her heart, right now.

"When you deposit that, don't forget to tell your bank that you've learned the one for three thousand, on a bank in Richmond, Virginia, is worthless and ask to have it charged back on your account, to save protest fees."

"Well, as Mr. Shakespeare said: 'All's well, that ends well,'" said Clyde, "although it looked rather queer, for a while. I'm very grateful for all your kindness."

"Oh, I'm a little bit queer, as the Quaker said," laughed Chanley, "or I'd never get away with these mad pranks of mine. Clyde, I may as well confess that checks are my weakness.

"I've always had a predilection for checks and for filling them out—that is, they excite my abnormal impulses. My original intention was to float the one I got from Dr. Fenway, that morning, and have my usual fling.

"However, you're off to a flying start with the coffee concern, and with Vivian's papa as a mobile reserve behind you—and he's strong for the Man Who Does, they told me you ought to get away with it as easily as I broke into the Black Hand society—from the shoulders up."

He sent the machine spinning ahead at a furious rate. They were on a down-grade now, and, presently, ricocheted from the last of the infrequently used road, out upon a thoroughfare bearing the sign "Camino Real," signifying that it was a part of the old "King's Highway," built by the Spaniards who first came to California, and modernized until it was like a sheet of glass.

For some moments only the whispering purr of their wheels along its surface broke the silence. Clyde understood, at last, that Chanley had just confessed to him that he wasn't altogether sane and the inmate of San Pablo knew it, himself.

The whole experience had been extraordinarily fantastic. Clyde was, however, very much taken with the chap's personality, his erudition, his marvelous acumen—above all, his blithe air of treating every problem which arose, and wished, heartily, that in some respects he had been likewise endowed.

Still, Chanley was a problem. It was a crime to aid him in eluding the authorities, and the ad writer didn't know just what to say or do next, when Chanley suddenly came to a fork in the road

To the right it led into a pretty town, with the Mission-style architecture of the railway station plainly visible, while down the shimmering line of rails could be discerned a heavy cloud of asphaltum smoke, signifying the approach of a train

"Where do we go from here?" asked Clyde, as Chanley paused and looked back at him enigmatically.

"We cut off twenty-seven miles by coming through Groton's Gap," explained Chanley, "at least the automobile guide says so. Where do we go from here? Why don't you sing it, Clyde? It's your day to sing, you know.

"Well, that's the Del Monte Limited coming up yonder. I'm going to head it off and rejoin Judkins. Mind you, if you're asked any questions, don't fail to say that you saw that naughty Italian literally disappear

"The handcuffs, Clyde. Miss Vivian, you take the wheel, please, and keep heading for that bit of mission architecture, yclept a railway station."

"What do you want of the handcuffs?" asked Clyde, as Chanley shifted to the other front seat to make way for Vivian.

"They are indispensable to the balance of our programme," smiled Chanley, as he took them. "Observe, my dear friend, the metamorphosis. It is even more startling than what you beheld when the second grasshopper leaped into Dr. Fenway's whiskers."

Before the other could divine his purpose, he had deftly snapped them on his own wrists.

"Now," smiled Chanley, gazing back at the astonished ad writer, "I'll wager that hardly any one will know the difference. Always remember, Clyde, that I never told you I was sane, did I?"

"I don't remember that you did. But," said Jones, doggedly, "I think you're sane."

"You couldn't make your future father-in-law believe it," jeered Chanley. "Now, list, mark, and inwardly digest these admonitions! Be sure and notify your bank, on your return to the city, that you've learned from authentic sources that the check for three thousand dollars, on Richmond, Virginia, which you sent them by messenger, is drawn on an account with no

funds, and instruct them to charge it back to your account. Do this when you deposit the one for ten thousand, that the Welcome Blend people gave me for you. And, Clyde—"

"What is it?" stammered Jones, as they crept nearer the pretty little depot, and the gnomelike front of the approaching limited flashed into view a mile or more away.

"Always avoid people with an irresistible predilection for filling out that kind of checks."

"See here!" shouted Jones, "you're not crazy. Why go back to that sanatorium? We've got a fast car "

"There's not one chance in a million of riding this rainbow-on-wheels over the State line with me in it. Besides, I'm a Ph.D., so, I've got to go back—I've got no option, whatever."

"What's a Ph.D.?" queried Vivian, in an awed tone, just as they came opposite the station platform.

"You tell her, Clyde."

"It's an abbreviation for Doctor of Philosophy, a degree conferred by universities on eminent scholars. There's no higher academic honor," explained her *fiancé*, gloomily.

"Now," beamed Chanley on both of them, "I call that nice from you, you dear, delightful, do-it-now, expurveyor of profitable publicity—only, I got my Ph.D. from dear old Judkins. Here he is coming on the train. He's the only man in the world that really understands me, Clyde, and his bark is worse than his bite

"I've humiliated him, hideously, with a million pranks, but he never shows umbrage. Whenever I get out of San Pablo for a day or two, and he comes after me, he always says: 'And now, Chanley, that you've 'ad your fling, I 'ope you'll go back peaceable.'

"Judkins never even read the Pythagorean philosophy, Clyde, yet he gave me a Ph.D., when he termed me phenomenally defective. I'm still a student at the university of perversity, and Judkins is the dean."

With the last two words the speaker vaulted from the tonneau to the station platform.

"This was some fling!" he averred, with a dazzling smile and a farewell wave from his manacled hands. "*Adios!* When you select your coat of arms, some day, Clyde, think of me

"Inscribe it with the motto: 'Fools Rush In,' on a field composed of a lemon-colored machine, with carmine wheels, couchant'"

He ran lightly up the platform and stepped into the smoking-car, leaving behind him two young people with lumps in their throats but otherwise superlatively happy.

"As the train drew past they saw him, plainly, sitting beside the still somnolent Judkins, and Clyde knew that the next scheduled stop would be where a trainman would announce:

"San Pablo! S-a-n P-a-b-l-o! Don't forget your bag-gage!"

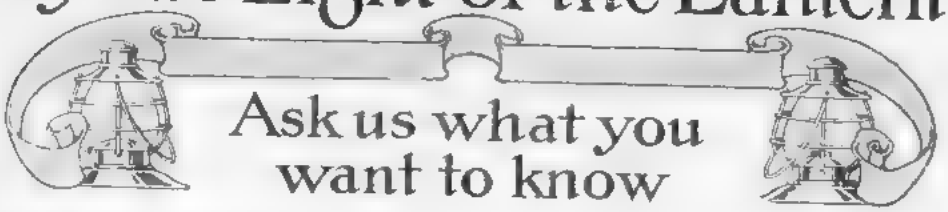
(The end.)

## Concerning the "By the Light of the Lantern" and "Telegraphic and Telephonic" Departments

WE have received several letters from readers who want to know what has become of the "By the Light of the Lantern" and "Telegraphic and Telephonic" departments.

These valuable and popular features of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE are still being published in fact, they are being published twice as often as under the monthly plan. In this week's issue you will find the "By the Light of the Lantern" department. Next week you will find the "Telegraphic and Telephonic" department each department is published every other week — in turn. Get the idea?

# By the Light of the Lantern




WE want to be as useful as possible to our readers, but, because of the great popularity of this department, we are obliged to impose certain restrictions. It is limited to the answering of questions of an informative, technical, or historical nature concerning the railroad business and allied occupations only. We cannot answer requests for positions or give information regarding employment. All letters should be signed with the full name of the writer, as an indication of his good faith. We will print only his initials. The editor begs that readers sending in questions will not be disappointed if the answers do not appear as early as expected. It frequently takes weeks to secure correct answers, owing to the complexity of the questions. All questions are answered free of charge. The editor earnestly requests his readers to bring immediately to his attention any errors they may find in this department. He reserves the right to refrain from answering any question.

### SAFETY APPLIANCES.

A. C., Marion, Ohio.—The first successful application of air brakes to passenger trains was made in 1868. In 1886 and 1887 the Master Car-Builders' Association held a series of tests, with the result that the brake was found to be adaptable to freight as well as passenger trains, and its general use in both freight and passenger service was rapidly extended thereafter

### AUTOMATIC COUPLERS.

2. After several years of investigation, the Master Car-Builders' Association recommended the first standard type of automatic coupler in 1887. In 1890 the American Railway Association, an official organization of the railroads, recognized as their standard the Master Car Builders' freight coupler, but in order to compel a standard type of coupler for all the railways of the country federal legislation was enacted In 1893 the Railway Safety Appliance Act was adopted, and this law provided that after January 1, 1898, it would be unlawful for any common carrier to use in interstate commerce any car "not equipped with couplers coupling automatically by impact, and which can be uncoupled without the necessity of men going between the ends of the cars." This law also provided that it should be unlawful to use in interstate commerce any locomotive "not equipped with the power driving-wheel brake, and appliances for operating the train-brake system or to run any train in such traffic after said date that has not a sufficient number of cars in it so equipped with power or train brakes that the engineer on the locomotive drawing such train can control its speed without requiring brakemen to use the common hand brake for that purpose" The law was amended in 1903 to provide that at least 50 per cent of the cars in a train should be controlled by air brakes applied from the engine, and the Interstate Commerce Commission was authorized from time to time, after full hearing, to "increase the minimum percentage of cars in any train required to be operated with power or train brakes which must have train brakes used and operated as aforesaid." The commission subsequently increased to 75 per cent the proportion of cars in a train on which power brakes must be operative, and on September 1, 1910, raised this minimum to 85 per cent

In consequence of these requirements, the use of automatic couplers and train brakes has become practically universal in the United States. Over 99 per cent of the locomotives and cars are fitted with train brakes and 90.67 per cent with automatic couplers. To-day it is exceptional for a train to have any cars that are not equipped with air brakes.

### BRITISH THERMAL UNIT.

W. M. J., Washington, District of Columbia.—A B. t. u. (British thermal unit) is the quantity of heat required to raise the temperature of one pound of water one degree As a gallon of water weighs 8⅓ pounds, it requires 8⅓ B. t. u. to raise the temperature of one gallon one degree, or 16⅔ B t. u. to raise the temperature two degrees, and so on

Thus, when a given coal is said to have a heat value of 13,800 B. t. u. per pound, it is meant that if all the heat caused by the complete combustion of one pound of that coal could be transmitted to 13,800 pounds of water, it would raise the temperature of that water one degree. Or, if all the heat could be transmitted to, say, 138 pounds of water, it would raise the temperature of that water just 100 degrees, because $138 \times 100 = 13{,}800$. The pound of water heated multiplied by the number of degrees the temperature has been raised equals the number of B. t. u. The standard

method of finding the heat value of a fuel is to burn a small sample of it in a tight steel bomb under water. The heat caused by the burning of the sample is then all absorbed by the water, and by multiplying the weight of the water by its rise in temperature and dividing by the weight of the sample, the heat value of the coal is calculated direct in B. t. u. per pound. Thus, if we burned a small sample weighing one five-hundredth of a pound in a bomb immersed in 5 pounds of water, and if the temperature of that water increased from, say, 70.4 degrees to 75.92 degrees, a rise of 5.52 degrees, the heat value of the coal would be

$$\frac{5 \times 5.52}{0.002} = 13{,}800 \text{ B. t. u. per pound}$$

## LOCOMOTIVE BUILDERS.

J. L. L. B., Winslow, Arkansas.—The names and addresses of the principal locomotive builders are: American Locomotive Company, New York; Baldwin Locomotive Works, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Lima Locomotive Corporation, Lima, Ohio; H. K. Porter Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Davenport Locomotive Works, Davenport, Iowa; Lakewood Engineering Co., Cleveland, Ohio; Milwaukee Locomotive Works, Erie, Pennsylvania; Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; General Electric Company, Schenectady, New York.

The several companies which you mention all became part of the American Locomotive Company at the time of the consolidation in 1901.

In regard to your other question we could not give an opinion relative to the invention to which you refer. We have not the slightest idea how the thing could be done, and in the absence of particulars would not venture an opinion in regard to it.

## PENNSYLVANIA EMPLOYEE.

J. S., New Castle, Delaware.—If you are certain that your friend lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and is employed firing for the Pennsylvania, we think you could readily secure his address by communicating with the division superintendent of the road at that point.—F. W. Smith, Jr. If you do not succeed in locating your friend in this way, you might be able to trace him through the local secretary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen.

## LOCOMOTIVE POWER.

C. F. G., Bronx, New York.—Tractive force is the effort exerted by a locomotive in turning its wheels by the action of the steam against the pistons, which, by means of the cross-heads, rods, *et cetera*, causes them to revolve and the locomotive to move along the track. At starting speeds a locomotive will usually develop its rated tractive effort, which is calculated from the size or dimensions of the engine, formulas for which have been repeatedly dealt with in this department. The tractive power of engines can be easily calculated, but finding the resistance of the trains that they will handle is a much more difficult problem, as many important factors enter into the calculation, such as grades, track curvature, conditions of lubrication, weather, conditions of equipment, track and curves, and the position of loaded and empty cars, the speed, *et cetera*. In fact, the subject is one that could hardly be fully handled within the confines of this department.

At starting, a force of at least 16 pounds per ton is required to start a train on straight and level track. At 10 miles per hour a tractive force of only 5 pounds per ton will handle the train.

The following example, based on tests of the Pennsylvania Railroad and formula of the American Locomotive Company, and presented by Mr. F. J. Cole, chief consulting engineer of the company, is typical, and indicates the many considerations that enter into the problem.

Figures are based on well-ballasted, properly maintained, first-class track, laid with heavy rails. Greater allowance must be made when track conditions are not so favorable.

The resistance of a car movement on a straight, level track may be divided into the following components:

(a) Journal friction.

(b) Rolling of the wheel on the rail; track resistance due to compression of the track, concussions; miscellaneous losses due to oscillations and vibrations that absorb energy from which no return can be obtained.

(c) Flange friction due to the pressure of the wheel flange against the rail.

(d) Atmospheric resistance; still air and wind.

In the above component parts it is probable that (a) is fairly constant within certain limitations of speed; that (b) and (c) increase with the speed, also vary materially with the condition of the track and stiffness of rail; and that (d) increases as the square of the speed. With heavy rails well supported, good surface and alinement, absence of kinks, properly maintained and gaged, the losses of energy due to (b) and (c) are reduced to a minimum.

Train resistance is usually expressed in pounds per ton (2,000 pounds). Under the most favorable conditions it may be as low as 2½ pounds per ton for 80-ton loaded cars, 7 or 8 pounds for empty cars at uniformly slow speeds, and 14 to 24 pounds, or even more, from the moment of start or rest, depending upon the time, temperature, and length of stop. These figures refer only to resistance of cars behind the tender, and for straight and level track. When in combination with grades or uncompensated curves additional amounts must be added.

For grades, the energy required is capable of exact calculation, amounting to 20 pounds per ton (2,000 pounds) for each 1 per cent.

For uncompensated curves, the resistance per

degree of curvature is usually taken at 0.8 pound or equivalent grade of 0.04 per cent.

For the sake of simplicity and greater accuracy the resistance of the engine and tender are considered separately.

## ENGINE AND TENDER RESISTANCE.

Engine and tender resistance is made up of the following components:

(a) Engine or machine friction is the energy required to overcome the internal machine friction of such parts as driving-wheels, pistons, valves, cross-heads, *et cetera*. This may be taken at 25 pounds per ton of weight on driving-wheels for all speeds, track resistance included.

(b) Weight on drivers in tons of 2,000 pounds × grade resistance only.

(c) Resistance of engine trucks, both leading and trailing, and tender trucks, assumed to be the same as the cars in the train.

(d) Head air resistance of engine assumed to be 120 square feet × 0.002 $V^2$. $V$ = velocity in miles per hour.

(e) Uncompensated curve resistance may be taken at 1¼ pounds per degree per ton of engine.

The sum of the above makes up the total engine and tender resistance which must be deducted from the available tractive power or added to the car resistance.

Example: What drawbar pull back of tender can be exerted by a Mikado superheater freight locomotive 282 S 261 type, 25-inch by 30-inch cylinders, 64-inch driving-wheels, and 200 pounds boiler pressure, at 20 miles per hour on a 0.5 per cent grade and compensated curves?

Tractive power (85% boiler pressure), 49,800 lbs.
Weight on drivers.....101.5 tons
Weight on trucks.....20.0 "

Weight on tender (2/3) load

Grade 0.5 per cent, 10 pounds per ton.

Piston speed, 525 feet per minute.

Speed factor (A. L. Co.), 0.75.

Tractive power at 20 M. P. H., 49,800 × 0.75, 37,350 pounds.

Internal friction, 101.5 × 25.0, 2,537 pounds.

Grade resistance, tender and engine trucks, 92 × 10, 920 pounds.

Rolling friction, tender and engine trucks, 92 × 3.27, 301 pounds.

Total engine and tender resistance, 4,773 pounds.

Available behind tender, 32,577 pounds.

Head air resistance when running through still air at 20 M. P. H. is not included in these figures, because it amounts to less than 100 pounds. Head air resistance for high speeds if a considerable factor; since the amount varies directly as the square of the velocity, in combination with the small amount of tractive power available back of tender after deducting the energy required for moving the engine and tender.

What tonnage with cars of different weights can be hauled at 20 M. P. H. by the engine described, conditions as in the foregoing examples?

Except in the first case, the weight includes the load and the light weight of cars. The denominator is taken from tables showing freight-car resistance, the 10 is added for grades of 0.5 per cent:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 20-ton cars, empty | $\frac{32{,}577}{7.0 + 10}$ | 1,915 tons |
| 30-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{5.13 + 10}$ | 2,150 " |
| 40-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{4.20 + 10}$ | 2,290 " |
| 50-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{3.64 + 10}$ | 2,300 " |
| 60-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{3.27 + 10}$ | 2,450 " |
| 70-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{2.0 + 10}$ | 2,505 " |
| 80-ton cars | $\frac{32{,}577}{2.8 + 10}$ | 2,545 " |

In the above, no allowance is made for variations in steam pressure.

## PULLMAN CHARGES.

O. A. B., Chicago, Illinois.—The additional charge made for transportation in Pullman cars was imposed in the hope that it would reduce the demand for Pullman accommodations, thus freeing the sleeping-cars for the use of troops on night journeys. The Director-General's order which made it necessary to purchase one and one-half tickets for a section, and two full tickets for the exclusive occupancy of a compartment was issued to discourage the well-to-do or extravagant from using more space than they really require, and unnecessarily excluding the less prosperous portion of the public from the use of Pullman space.

## FIREMAN'S QUALIFICATIONS.

T. J. D., Washington, District of Columbia.—It is the policy of the railroads to employ as firemen only such men as will in time become competent to run a locomotive as engineer. This requires that a man should have at least a common school education, be of good habits, robust, and in good physical condition. He must be alert, of sound judgment, and good reasoning faculties. With these qualifications advancement will come to those who are conscientious in the discharge of their duties and devote their leisure time to study. Twenty-one years is usually the minimum age at which men are employed for

such service, but this regulation has been suspended at a number of points. We doubt, however, if a man of your years would receive consideration unless you possess extraordinary physical advantages.

## NEW TIE FASTENER.

A. R., -It has been the endeavor of the railroads for some years past to obtain and develop a metal tie or rail fastener that will not alone firmly hold the rails in place, but at the same time stand the severe strains and shocks incident to heavy traffic. A tie of this kind is set forth in a patent recently brought to the attention of the United States Railroad Administration, the invention of George Poehlein, of Jacksonville, Florida. It possesses a number of novel features, one of which is the resistance to spreading of the rails. The fastener is provided with flanges which fit into the tie-plate in such a way that the more pressure that is brought to bear against them the tighter they clamp, thereby affording great resistance, and at the same time holding the ties against washouts, tie cutting, *et cetera*. The flanges used with this tie and fastener are also a labor-saving device. They are used in place of spikes, and can be put in place or removed with great rapidity. A special instrument is provided for ejecting them, so that in case a track is to be taken up or shifted, it can be done quickly.

## RAILWAY OFFICIALS GUIDE.

F. W. P., Pauls Valley, Oklahoma.—"The Pocket List of Railroad Officials" contains the names of officials in charge of the railroads, private car companies, telegraph, and express companies of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The book is issued quarterly by the Railroad Equipment and Publication Company, 75 Church Street, New York. The price of a single issue is $1.50; annual subscription price $4.00.

## U. S. RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION.

O. F. S., New York.—In the administration of the railroads under Government control there is a central organization at Washington, of which the Director-General, William G. McAdoo, is the head. Under the central organization are seven regional directors having charge of an equal number of regional districts into which the railroad mileage of the country has been divided. These districts are not governed by geographical boundaries, as many lines, most of whose mileage is in one district, penetrate areas that are also included in other regional districts. The districting has had for its purposes the assembling under the management of one regional director of the larger portion of the mileage serving his territory. The limits of administrative authority are therefore determined rather by the railway lines than by the geographical boundaries, as they have been fixed more with regard to the movement of traffic and the service of the public than with reference to conventional State boundaries or groupings.

Thus the Pennsylvania lines and the Baltimore and Ohio lines east of the Ohio River in the Allegheny district, and those west of the Ohio River in the Eastern district, which contains the whole of the New York Central Division. This course has been followed in pursuance of a policy that contemplates the preferential use of the more motherly trunk lines for fast through freight and passenger traffic between the Chicago district and the east, thereby releasing the lines in the Allegheny district for the distribution of the enormous traffic that originates in the Pittsburgh district, where congestion of local and through freight in the past has created some of the most costly and exasperating blockades that have been known in the history of American transportation.

The regional districts are both named and numbered, and a list of them and their regional directors is as follows:

1. The eastern district, A. H. Smith, regional director, New York.
2. The Allegheny district, C. H. Markham, regional director, Philadelphia.
3. The Pocahontas district, N. D. Maher, regional director, Roanoke, Virginia.
4. The southern district, B. L. Winchell, regional director, Atlanta, Georgia.
5. The northwestern district, R. H. Aishton, regional director, Chicago, Illinois.
6. The central western districts, Hale Holden, regional director, Chicago, Illinois.
7. The southwestern district, B. F. Bush, regional director, St. Louis, Missouri.

Under the regional directors come in turn district directors, in charge of subdivisions of the regional districts; federal managers, in charge of the more important single divisions or groups of less important lines; general managers, operating minor divisions, and terminal managers, having control of all terminals at the more important railway centers and ports.

There is also a marine section of the division of transportation, with headquarters at Washington, and a manager of this section has supervision of the many steamship lines owned by the railroads.

## RAILWAY TRADE PAPERS.

E. D. P., New York City.—*Railway and Locomotive Engineering*, published by the Angus Sinclair Company, and the *Railway Mechanical Engineer*, published by the Simmons-Boardman Publishing Company, are representative publications that circulate among railway mechanical department officers. The address of the publishers of both papers is New York.

The publications that may be said to reach financial and other general railway officers are the *Railway Age*, New York, and the *Railway Review*, Chicago, Illinois.

# THE MASTER FRAUD.

BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS,

**Author of "Hurry-Up Bill—Engineer," "Blow for Blow," "Hank Couples 'Em Up," "Cheerful Tillie and the Lady Op," "Despatcher Henry Cooks a Ham," etc.**

**A FOUR-PART STORY—PART THREE.**

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

WHEN Albert Quayle died, he left his fortune of four million dollars to his orphaned granddaughter, Inez Braddon, whereabouts unknown. Marsden, his attorney, engaged Peterson, a lawyer in a city where he thought the girl might be, to search for her. He found her, told her of her good fortune, and asked for proofs of identity, which she said were at her boarding-house. Peterson went there to get them, but they had disappeared. Another man had called to see Inez, and had been left alone while the landlady was in another part of the house. Peterson believed that this man had stolen the proofs. Jack, an ex pickpocket whom Peterson had reformed and employed, trailed him to a hotel, where he was registered as Henry M. Dryden, of New York.

Accompanied by the chief of police, Peterson called on Dryden, but could not find the proofs. Dryden said that he represented Quinn & Maxson, theatrical agents, and had called to offer Inez an engagement.

Two operatives of the Quigley Detective Agency, who had been retained by Peterson to check up her story, went to New York and reported to Quinn & Maxson, after which they reported to Peterson that they could not confirm the girl's story.

The detectives, Laura Dryden (an actress), Quigley, and others were conspiring to obtain the Quayle millions for "the master criminal" by substituting Laura for Inez.

Dillingham, a lawyer, had been retained by Quinn & Maxson to carry out the fraud in an apparently legal manner. He brought Laura to Peterson's office, and introduced her as Inez Braddon. She claimed to have proofs identical with those stolen from Inez. Peterson went to the hotel to see the proofs, taking Inez with him and concealing her in an adjoining room. Laura exhibited photographs which she claimed to be those of Inez Braddon and her mother and marriage and birth certificates. Peterson brought Inez in, and she identified the photograph of her mother as genuine, but pronounced the supposed picture of Inez a counterfeit and the documents spurious.

From two New York photographers Peterson learned that the pictures had been obtained by a young woman calling herself Inez Braddon. The picture of Inez's mother had been made from an old plate, and the photographer said that he would recognize the girl who obtained it, if he saw her again. When he saw Inez, he said that she was not the girl, but when he saw Laura Dryden he recognized her as the girl who had obtained the photograph.

Next day, as Peterson and Jack drove about town in Peterson's car, they were followed by three men in a green car. That night he received by phone a warning to "Lay off that stuff," and later, while calling on Inez, a shot was fired at him through a window.

## CHAPTER XIII.

INEZ RECEIVES ANOTHER CALLER.

PETERSON wheeled about, his first thought for the girl. A scream had died on her lips. It had got that far and then her fear had killed it.

Unconsciously she flung out her hands to Peterson. He seized her hands and drew her toward him.

"Are you hurt?" he gasped.

She shook her head dumbly. Then her voice came back.

"Are you?" she whispered.

"No. Great Heavens, I thought you had been struck. You seemed faint, and you were white. Thank God you are not hurt!"

Her face was close to his. He could feel her rapid breathing as her bosom rose and fell.

Angus Peterson felt a sudden sense of desire to say something to her that would be adequate to what he felt. But, master of speech though he had always been, he could think of nothing.

He was aware suddenly that the girl was

looking into his eyes. He saw something there that baffled him. It was something personal toward himself, but he could find no label for it.

And then she drew her hands quickly from his. She half turned toward the window. Deeply ashamed of himself now, for that moment he had seized or had been about to seize, Peterson followed her glance.

"Some one shot through the window," he said. "He was trying to shoot me. Don't let it worry you.

"It is an echo of the affair of the little green car, I'm sure. They have followed me. That's all. Don't let it worry you," he reiterated.

"But you must do something," she said.

"Yes. I must ask you to step into the hall quickly. I've been stupid to let you stand here so long."

She walked rapidly to the door with a docility she had not shown before. He followed her. The hall light was turned economizingly low. They stood in its dimness.

"What shall you do now?" she asked. "Notify the police?"

"No. The police are either careless or inefficient. They couldn't do anything. There is only a hole in a worn-out screen, and possibly a track or two under the window.

"Those might be clues to a great detective, but I don't number any great detectives among my friends. And I am not any sort of a detective myself. No, I must just let it pass for the time."

"But," the girl objected, "you can't go on like this. They'll kill you sooner or later."

"No," he said, "I don't think that's their game. I was too close to whoever fired that shot. He couldn't have missed me if he had wanted to hit me."

He thought of the telephone message he had received that afternoon.

"They're just trying to scare me."

"But they may fire at you again as you go out to your car," she expostulated.

Before he could speak, there was a violent ringing at the door-bell. At the same instant doors began to be opened along the hall. Heads were thrust out. The landlady appeared at the door of the dining-room.

"Who's there?" she called in a shaken voice.

The girl went back along the hall past the curious eyes turned on her in the half light.

"It is I, Miss Braddon," she told the frightened woman. "My attorney, Mr. Peterson, was here—"

"The tire of my automobile blew up," said Peterson behind her.

"Land sakes," said the woman, "I thought there was some shooting going on."

"No," Peterson laughed, "no shooting. And now, Miss Braddon, I will say good night."

The girl started toward the street door.

"What shall you do?" she said.

"Open the door, first thing," he replied. "Somebody is ringing as if he were in trouble."

"But—"

"I must," he said. "First thing you know we'll both be in the newspapers in an unenviable light. Please stand back against the wall so that the door will screen you."

She obeyed. Peterson opened the door. His driver stood there.

The man opened his lips to speak. Peterson quickly stepped outside the door, closing it behind him.

"Softly," he said. "What did you see?"

"I heard a shot and I see a man run from the side of the house," the driver said. "I thought you might be in trouble."

"What sort of man?"

"A little man—that's all I can say."

Peterson thought of Jack, and his face hardened.

"It was nothing," he said. "A little accident—nothing more. Wait a moment."

He reentered the hall.

"Good night," he said to the girl. "I must go now. Don't worry. I will see you again soon."

She held out her hand, and he took it. He found it hot and unsteady.

"Good night," she said in a low voice.

He wanted to say something—wanted to linger for another moment, but he could think of nothing to say. He pressed her hand and went into the night.

"I don't want you to say anything about this," he said to his driver "Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the man.

"Take me home," said Peterson

As Peterson went into his own house three-quarters of an hour later, the landlady rapped on the door of Inez's room.

"A gentleman to see you, miss," she said.

Inez thought Peterson had come back. She went down into the hall. The visitor stood in the gloom near the door. She advanced a step from the bottom of the stairs.

"Why—" she began.

"Just a moment," the man said. "I'll explain."

At home, Peterson went to his library. He lit a cigar and sank back in a big chair. A muffled bell whirred

It sounded loud in the big, silent room. Peterson took the telephone receiver from its hook.

"Well?" he said sharply.

"That you, Mr. Peterson?"

Peterson knew the voice.

"A moment," he said.

He put his hand over the transmitter and tapped a bell on the table sharply. A servant came noiselessly.

"Call central," he ordered. "Find out where the man is who is talking on this line."

The man withdrew without a word. Peterson waited. The man came back as noiselessly as before.

"He is in a drug-store at Eighteenth and Mandrake," he said.

Peterson nodded and the man withdrew. Eighteenth and Mandrake was a block from where Inez boarded. The man on the telephone was Jack.

Peterson was sure now that it was Jack who had shot at him. He did not know quite what to do. He didn't want to turn Jack over to the police just now.

Jack had a little too much information about what Peterson was trying to do. He decided to see what the man had to say for himself. He took his hand from the transmitter.

"This is Peterson," he said.

"This is Jack."

"Yes"

"I got something for you. Understand?"

"I may understand when you tell me what it is."

"That girl, you know—the one that lives a block or so from here?"

Peterson edged forward on his chair.

"Yes, yes," he breathed.

"Well, after you left to-night she had another caller. Understand? A man came to see her."

"Who was he?"

"I give it up. I didn't know him."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone. And the girl with him."

Sweat leaped out on his forehead. The hand that held the receiver shook. Then sudden suspicion flamed through his brain.

"Wait there for a moment," he said. "What's that number?"

Jack gave it to him.

"Wait there," he said again.

He clicked the receiver to its place and took it down again quickly. The operator came in. He gave the number of Inez's boarding-house.

In a moment a woman's voice said, "Hello!"

"I wish to speak to Miss Braddon," he said crisply.

"She ain't here," said the voice. "She went out a bit ago."

"With whom?"

"I don' know. Some man that called on her. I never see him before. I—"

Peterson hung up, cutting off the circuit.

"My Heaven, what development is this?" he asked himself.

He sat with his hands spread out on the table in front of him. A hundred notions flashed through his brain.

Was the girl false? Had she been lured away? Was she now in the power of those forces who were working against her and himself?

Was he himself the center of some huge conspiracy with Inez leagued with the other side? Perhaps neither she nor the other woman was Inez Braddon. Perhaps the whole thing was a sham battle.

He called the number of the drug-store, and Jack himself answered.

"Wait for me there," Peterson said.

" I'll be there very shortly. Don't go away now."

He rang for a servant and ordered his car. The lights of it sped past the library window presently. He ran down the front steps

" Take me back to that house again," he commanded. " Drive like the devil. Never mind the police."

They slid down the graveled driveway and wheeled into the long road. To Peterson it seemed that the car was creeping. He constantly urged the man to make more speed.

" She's doin' all that's in her," the man said after a while.

Peterson glanced about him. The dark shapes of trees swept past. The widely separated lights of the country road leaped by one by one. He saw that they were flying.

When they reached the boarding-house again he leaped down. His ring brought the landlady. She found a composed, polite man waiting for her.

" Good evening," she said, recognizing him.

" I should like to speak to Miss Braddon just a moment," he said, and he held his voice even with an effort.

" Well, now, she ain't in," the woman said. " She went out soon after you left."

" Oh, thank you," said Peterson. " It was nothing important—just a detail that had escaped me."

He flung himself into the car.

" Next corner," he groaned.

As the car stopped at the next corner Jack came out to meet it. Peterson questioned him rapidly.

" Why didn't you call me this afternoon as you promised?" Peterson demanded angrily.

" I started out on my own hook," Jack said. " I got a hunch that the thing to do was to watch the young lady and see "

" Well, never mind. Why didn't you follow her and that man?"

" I thought you'd be sore if I didn't let you know," Jack said.

" What sort of looking man was he?"

" Smooth, well dressed, smilin', handsome, an' all that stuff."

" Did you see the girl's face?"

" Sure I did. I run down this side and crossed over an' met 'em face to face."

" How did she look? Talk fast."

" I can't tell you exactly how she looked. She wasn't scared. She hadn't been cryin'.

" She wasn't even trembling. She was holdin' her head up like a thoroughbred."

There was no common ground of speech for Peterson to meet Jack on to get a more definite description of the look that had been on Inez's face. But Peterson could feel the look himself, though he had not seen it.

" Exalted " was the word that came to him. And when it came, his doubt of Inez vanished, but in the wake of the doubt came an agony of uncertainty.

Had one of those who had been torturing him reached out of the night and snatched her up? Had they made certain of her destruction by some terrible trap they had set for her?

" Has any idea come to you as to where they might be, Jack?" he asked.

" That guy ain't livin' in no cheap dump," Jack said. " He's a swell un, all right. He'd be at one of the swell hotels if he's a stranger in town.

" If he lives here reg'lar, he's got a 'partment somewhere by his lonesome. He's a high-up worker."

" Get in," Peterson said.

Jack climbed in. Peterson ordered his man to drive slowly. Presently the form of a portly policeman came into view. Peterson hailed him.

" We have missed a couple of friends," he explained. " A man and a girl."

He described them, Inez minutely, and the man vaguely. The officer pondered politely. Then he shook his head.

" Ain't seen 'em," he said.

" Drive on," said Peterson with a sigh.

They asked their question of countless policemen, hour by hour. Always they got the same answer. They drove up and down the deserted streets.

Peterson dropped into hotel lobbies. Jack, at the risk of apprehension, bought numberless cigars in all-night saloons. But Peterson got no trace of the girl, nor Jack of the man.

Dawn came with a red sun and a cloudless sky. The city streets were already hot and dry. Peterson felt tired and discouraged. He told himself that as a detective he was a joke.

"We may as well go home and freshen up," he said spiritlessly.

"Why'n't you call her house now," Jack said. "Mebbe she's back."

Peterson took the suggestion mechanically. He called from a drug-store booth.

"I merely wish to know whether Miss Braddon has returned home," he told the landlady, as he recognized her voice. "I don't wish to speak to her."

"Oh, she's here," the landlady said. "Yes, she's up in her room."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A CONFESSION.

"WE'LL eat," said Peterson, returning to the car.

"What 'd you find out?" Jack asked.

"She's back," Peterson answered briefly.

"Where 'd she been with that guy?"

Peterson turned on him angrily.

"There's one thing I want you to learn, Jack. This is your first, last and only lesson: Keep your mouth shut unless you've got something to tell me."

"All right," Jack said, and he looked out of the car at the buildings that were being swept past them.

Under Peterson's direction they drew up in the rear of a saloon where meals were served. The three of them ate in silence at the same table

Peterson reflected that the whim of notifying Inez Braddon himself was leading him to strange changes in his manner of life, as well as to strange adventures. He had always prided himself on being democratic, but he had fallen into a kind of exclusiveness of habit through being alone in the world.

The law had been his business and his pleasure. Men whom he paid served him. And that was about all his life had amounted to.

But now he was sitting at table with a former crook—the man that drove his car.

"Where are you going, Jack?" he asked, as they left the saloon. "Where can I find you?"

"Know where Lafferty's in K Street is?"

"I've heard of the place."

"Send word there. It 'll get me."

He started briskly down the street, his eyes roving. Peterson stepped into the car and bade the man drive him to Inez's boarding-house.

At the boarding-house he waited again in the parlor. The girl appeared in the doorway almost immediately.

She stood there for a moment, her eyes fixed on his face. He rose.

"Well?" he said, and his voice sounded strained in his own ears.

"You know that I was away last night?" she asked.

"Certainly I know it."

He regarded her rather angrily. He saw that she was subdued. Her face was pale, and her eyes were heavy.

"May I ask where you were last night?" he demanded. "I ask, of course, only if your trip had to do with the business in hand."

"What other business do you imagine it could have to do with?" she asked in a low voice.

"Well, I can't work in the dark," he said. "Is there anything you can tell me?"

"There is something I must tell you—yes," she said.

She seemed about to go on, paused, and then sat down quickly. She was breathing a little fast. Peterson, too, sank into a chair.

"You are not yourself," he said. "Take a little time. Perhaps I have been a little rough. But I have been searching for you all night."

"I thought you would be when I heard that you knew I was gone," she said. "You have been so kind to me."

"Look here," said Peterson. "Things can't go on like this. You know as well as I do that my conduct in this case has been unusual.

"Busy lawyers don't generally play detective for their clients. I have practically given all my time to your affairs.

"It was a whim at first, growing out of

the weather, I think. It's nearing my vacation time, and I must have had a touch of vacation-fever.

"Then I got—interested. I want to see you through. But do you think it's safe for you to go out at night with a strange man, especially after what occurred in this room last evening?"

"It was safe," she said. "Nothing happened to me."

"Where were you?"

She sat erect in her chair and drew a full breath

"Mr. Peterson," she said, still in that same hushed voice, "it doesn't matter where I was. There is something very much more important that I must tell you. It will release you from the case."

"Oh," said Peterson, "in that event I don't see any use in your telling me anything. If you have secured the services of some one more competent, I am pleased. I wish you success."

"I have secured the services of no one else. I shall need the services of no one."

"You are trying to mystify me?"

"No."

Her voice changed a little on the word. She seemed to be making it harder by an effort of her will.

"No, I am not trying to mystify you. I—Mr. Peterson, I am not Inez Braddon."

There was silence in the dingy room while he stared at her. She stared back Her face had grown ashen.

He could see that her teeth were shut hard together. She was doing her best to keep her breathing from becoming violent.

Peterson was stupefied. He could scarcely believe his ears. He had trusted this girl—a stranger to him -in a way in which he rarely trusted people he had known for years

In that curious subconscious way in which the mind goes on working in moments of paralysis of conscious thought, he realized that she had brought him nothing but her word. Her proofs of her identity had been only in what she had told him. And he had been unable to substantiate her statements.

"What did you say?" he asked, out of his conscious mind.

"I say I am not Inez Braddon. I am an impostor. I have imposed on you."

His brain was whirling now. He did not believe her. She was playing some kind of ghastly part.

"You are joking, aren't you?" he asked.

"I am not joking. I wish I were."

He rose, crossed to her, and stood before her. She lifted her head so that their eyes met. He looked deep into her eyes, and he could find no dishonesty there.

"Why are you telling me this?" he asked

"Because you have a right to know. I have deceived no one but you. When I have told you, I have told the only person I have wronged by my deception."

He continued to gaze into the deeps of her eyes. He saw regret there and sadness. And he thought he saw—or hoped—an elusive shadow of liking for himself.

"That's a lie, of course," he said.

Her color came up through her pallor. The lights in her eyes gave place to a look of determination only

"I don't wish to be harsh," he went on, "but you are telling me a lie. There is no other word for it.

"And it is a lie that somebody else manufactured. It doesn't come from you directly."

He lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Tell me, has some one been trying to frighten you?"

"No," she replied slowly.

"Yes, some one has. That's it. You're Inez Braddon. Come now."

"No; oh, no. I wish I were."

He went back to his seat and sat down sidewise on it. He looked through the window into the drowsing summer street. He wanted to give her a little time for thought.

She sat motionless. When, after a time, she did not amplify her statement or make further denial, he turned to her.

"If you are not Inez Braddon, who are you?" he asked.

"I am just what I appeared to be when you found me in the store," she said, speaking rapidly as if she were glad of the chance to tell him that. "I am an orphan. My parents died when I was fifteen. I began

to work for my own living, and I have been working for it ever since."

"And you gained your poise, your self-reliance, and your education by working in a department store?"

"I have always read a great deal. I like to read and study."

"I should think a girl as ambitious as you are would have read and studied somewhat to improve her material circumstances."

"I did the best I could, but I never seemed to get anywhere."

"And what is your real name?"

"My last name is Braddon. That much is true. My first name is Margaret."

"And how, Margaret Braddon, did you happen to lay claim to the Quayle fortune?"

His tone was bantering. He was sure that she was deceiving him for some purpose which she thought good. He expected to be able to discover what that purpose was.

"I was tired of being poor," she said. "There is nothing extraordinary in that. Most girls who work for small wages are tired of being poor

"When you came to me and asked me questions, I merely followed your lead, if you remember By the time I needed particulars they were in the papers."

"How about the proofs that were in your room at the house on Allen Drive?"

"I had some pictures of my own parents and the certificates I spoke of. But they were not what I represented them to be."

"And now you are determined to throw away your grandfather's fortune?"

"Throw it away? I have no claim on the Quayle fortune. I could not prove my identity."

"But let's make a fight for it—you and I together. That's what we started out to do."

She saw that he was smiling faintly.

"Mr. Peterson," she said, "you are wasting your time. I am not Inez Braddon. I am Margaret Braddon. I have told you the truth at last."

"What prompted you to tell me the truth at last?"

"Because I could no longer bear to deceive you."

"You mean because you could not longer bear to deceive me, or because you could no longer bear to carry on a deception, no matter whom you were deceiving."

"I could no longer bear to deceive you."

He rose and again crossed to her chair.

"I do not believe what you are telling me," he said. "And I want you to understand that I am going right on, as I have been going, till I get to the bottom of this affair. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Promise me you will come away from this house with me right now. I want your promise, even before you leave the room.

"I will take you to another city and leave you there, somewhere, where you will be safe. Will you go?"

"I cannot," she said.

"You're stubborn, aren't you?"

"No, I am not stubborn. But I tell you you are mistaken. I have told you I lied. You will be only wasting your time."

"Will you promise to remain in this house—not to leave it on any account?"

"No, I cannot promise even that."

Peterson had one idea in reserve. He proceeded to act upon it promptly. He held out his hand to her.

"Good-by!" he said quietly.

She looked up in surprise, but she took his hand in a cold, limp clasp.

"Good-by!" she said. "And thank you very much for being kind."

He turned and left the room abruptly. Even when she heard the street-door slam she did not stir.

As he heard the street-door also, a man, who had been kneeling before a door which led from this room to the one adjoining, rose to his feet. He appeared in the hall and then in the doorway of the room where the girl sat.

"He didn't believe you," he said.

"No," the girl retorted with a proud lift of her head. "He didn't believe anything I told him."

The man turned and went rapidly up the stairs. He came down almost at once and emerged into the street. At the corner he was joined by another man.

"I'm off," the first man said. "Don't

lose sight of her and let us know what develops."

"All right," the second man said.

A short time later Peterson's driver appeared at Lafferty's in K Street. Jack followed him from the place at a nod.

Peterson was waiting in the car outside. He motioned him to enter. The driver turned the car about and sped away.

"I want you to watch that girl," Peterson ordered. "Don't lose sight of her. Call on the phone now and then and make sure she is all right. Don't let any harm come to her.

"If she leaves the house follow her, no matter where she goes. Here's some more money for you. You may need it.

"Write me at my office every day. Telegraph, if necessary. I shall be out of town for two or three days."

## CHAPTER XV.

### VERIFICATION.

AT midnight a machine with lights dimmed left Peterson's house and turned away from town. It went down the country road at twenty miles an hour, running noiselessly.

In thirty minutes the lights of a railroad station came into view. The car passed through a sleeping village of two dozen houses and a single store.

Thirty minutes more and a village somewhat larger was passed in the same way. The car kept on for five miles till it came to a crossroads. It turned down this

A mile and there was another main road. Along this the car turned back toward town. At the first intersection, however, it wheeled into a road that was just sufficiently wide to permit the machine to keep to it

A mile in this direction and the main road from which the driver had first turned came into view again. The driver again headed in the direction of town.

After a bit Peterson, sitting alone in the tonneau, leaned out. The lights of the second village were coming into view.

He waited a moment. Then he leaned to the driver.

"Stop here," he said. "I don't think any one is following us, do you?"

"Haven't seen a sign of anybody. I don't believe there's a machine anywhere near us. This road ain't traveled much at night."

"What time is it?"

"Twenty-five to one."

The train that Peterson was to take to New York was due here at twelve-forty-five.

"Wait here eight minutes," he ordered. "Watch now that you don't wait too long."

The driver sat with his watch in his hand. Suddenly he shoved it into his pocket and started his car. It leaped toward the station.

The driver and Peterson sprang to the platform as the car stopped. As they did so they heard the blast of an engine's whistle afar in the night.

"Go ahead!" Peterson said.

The driver, as if by prearrangement, ran into the station. The operator was standing at the window, looking down the track.

"Flag that eastbound," the driver said in a low tone. "I got a passenger out here that wants to get on."

"You ain't got time for a ticket," the operator said.

"Never mind that."

Peterson, waiting in the shadow outside, saw the signals turned till the green-and-white, which indicates that a train is to stop at a flag-station, showed. At the same moment the headlight of the engine appeared around the curve.

There was a breath, during which the engine thundered toward the station. Then there were two short, nervous blasts from the engine's whistle in acknowledgment of the operator's signals. The locomotive drew down to the station, its wheels grinding on the track.

It had barely stopped when Peterson sprang on board. The train was started again. As it pulled away from the station Peterson leaned out.

There was no one in sight. He alone had boarded the train

"Unless there are mind-readers in that outfit I've made my getaway," he said to himself.

He had boarded the rear-end of one of the day-coaches. He made his way down the aisle of this toward the Pullmans. A little touch of silver makes a porter kind, and Peterson was soon in a berth

That decision he had held in reserve when he had said good-by to Miss Braddon was that he would go to New York and Albany and ascertain whether her first story or her second was true. Luckily he still had the addresses she had given him in both places.

He stepped down at Albany in the early morning. Two or three other passengers alighted, but they paid no attention to him

He waited till they had gone their several ways, and then he started up-town. After breakfast he began the search which he expected would mean much to him.

His first objective was that house in which Inez Braddon's father had died six years before. He found the place without difficulty.

A woman of thirty opened the door. Peterson introduced himself.

"What's the trouble?" she asked.

"There is no trouble," he said. "I am merely trying to get track of some one who knew a man who died in this house six years ago."

"Well, you can come in," she said.

She ushered him into a little sitting-room and set a chair for him.

"I wasn't to home six years ago," the woman said before he could speak. "Who was the party you wanted to know about?"

"His name was Braddon. He was a musician. He was taken ill while playing here and died. I want to get what information I can about him"

"I don't recollect any such person," the woman said

"Is there any one in the house who lived here six years ago?" Peterson asked.

"Ma is dead!" the woman answered. "Pa is here, but he's pretty old and deaf."

"Did he live here six years ago?"

"Six years," the woman said proudly. "He's lived here nearly forty years, right in this same house. He owns it."

"Will you call him?"

"Sure I'll call him."

She was back presently with a bent, gray, old man, who moved feebly with the aid of a cane. He sank into a chair without appearing to notice Peterson.

"You tell me what you want to know," the woman said.

Peterson repeated what he had already told her. The old man produced an ear-trumpet.

The woman shouted into it. The old man's face brightened.

"Feller that played a fiddle?" he said. "Sure I remember him well. He had a nice woman and a nice girl with him. She was a very pretty girl.

"'Bout eighteen, I should say. Very pleasant to me she was. Had the purtiest eyes you ever see. Honest and nice.

"The feller that played the fiddle got inflammation of the lungs. He died just like that."

He snapped his withered fingers feebly.

"They took him back to Noo York, I think. Shucks, no, they didn't neither! What 'm I thinkin' about? They had the funeral right here from the house, an' they took him right up to the buryin'-ground.

"The woman, she said it didn't make much difference where he was buried, because they didn't have no reg'lar home, anyway. They felt pretty bad—the woman an' the girl. Yes, they was nice people, especially the girl."

"Where was he buried?" Peterson asked.

There was something in his tone that made the woman stare as she repeated the question to her father. The old man gave the name of the cemetery. Peterson thanked them and left.

By night he had a photograph of the grave of Inez Braddon's father and an affidavit from the old man. By the next afternoon he had traced the Braddons through the various New York addresses Inez had given him.

He failed to verify in only two instances. In those two instances new tenants occupied the houses.

He was overjoyed at his good fortune, but he was also puzzled and frightened when he thought of Inez's behavior the day before. Why had she deceived him?

The thought haunted him through his dinner, on his way to the station, and even

after he had lain down in his berth. Suddenly another thought came to unnerve him.

"Good Heavens," he murmured to himself, "it seems incredible!"

But he had to give it credence. The facts were there, and his legal mind could not get away from them. Quigley's men had gone over this ground, and they had reported their inability to find anything. Then the chief had sent that smooth, young detective to back-track on Quigley's men.

Of course Quigley's men might have gone on a lark and done no work. That sort of thing had happened before in Quigley's own experience. But the smooth, young detective seemed made of different stuff.

Left to himself, he would have done what he had been told to do.

Only one conclusion was possible to Peterson: The men who were trying to steal the Quayle millions had bribed the detective. But how had they known what his errand was?

The chief never talked of department business, and his men knew that he would behead any man who did. Ambition had shone in the young detective's face. He would do his work—unless he had been bought.

"In Heaven's name, whom am I going to trust?" Peterson murmured. "I've got to have help!"

He thought for a while longer, and then he suddenly slipped his feet to the car-floor and began pulling on his clothing. When the train stopped at the next station he stepped down. He had to wait an hour for a train to carry him back to New York.

It was after eleven o'clock when he arrived. He called a cab and had himself driven to the home of a legal friend, a man high in the profession and one whom he could trust absolutely.

The light was still burning in his library. He received Peterson with surprised cordiality.

"You look worried," he said. "We'll have a drink and then you can talk."

Peterson accepted the one drink with enthusiasm. He felt he needed stimulation after what he had been through.

He told his story concisely, but so plainly, that his friend absorbed every detail. The friend showed no astonishment. He had seen too much of life.

"I know the man you want," he said. "He's keen and absolutely trustworthy. He's a private detective, but few people know it.

"Not more than a dozen different people in New York have employed him. He's worked all over the world. But he'll cost you money, Pete."

"I don't care," Peterson said. "Miss Braddon will be amply able to pay the bill if I can't"

"You'll remain with me to-night?" his friend asked.

"Would it be asking too much—"

"Certainly not."

The lawyer rang a bell, and very shortly his car glided down into the street. The lawyer gave the directions, and they whirred away over the pavement.

They came to an apartment-house. In the vestibule the lawyer pushed a button.

"He's at home," he said. "Up we go!"

In the apartment to which the lawyer led him, Peterson was introduced to a man who seemed a personage in his way. He was a man of fifty, who looked like a soldier. After his introduction to Peterson he listened without comment to Peterson's recital.

"I will take the case for a retainer of ten thousand dollars, with forty thousand added, if I solve the mystery," he said

Peterson reached for his checkbook. He felt as if he had been struck in the face. The most he had ever heard of a private detective being paid was five hundred dollars.

The detective glanced at the check and put it carefully into his wallet. He lit a cigarette.

"Quigley, Dillingham, Laura Arnold, the bribed photographer, the press-agent, the man who shot at you, the men in the little green car, your chief of police—"

"You don't think the chief is crooked, do you?" Peterson gasped.

Paul Cort looked up with a mild smile

"Crooked, of course!" he said. "He's old. He's getting ready to quit. He has a little money, perhaps, and a pension in sight. You say he seems slightly soured.

"A hundred thousand dollars, say, would seem an immense sum for his declining years. He bought them, just as he bought all the other players who have been coming and going in your little drama."

"'He' bought them. Who is 'he'?"

Paul Cort did not smile now. His smooth face hardened.

"The master-mind! There is one. All these people have not been working at random.

"First, they stole your client's proofs. Then they jailed Jack, not knowing what information he had picked up. You got Jack out.

"They knew he had communicated with you. You knew something. They were ready for that. If they could keep you from learning anything, they would use no violence. But you had a little information.

"To the ordinary criminal that would have meant nothing. To the master-criminal it meant much. He had every play arranged in advance.

"He was ready to anticipate any development. While he had you groping in the dark, he was so sure of what his next step would be that he had to pay attention only to what developed.

"Jack's information was a development. And so they resorted to violence."

"Why didn't they kill me?"

"Except in books killing is extremely dangerous business. The master-criminal never kills unless he is absolutely forced to do so. They merely sought to frighten, not you so much as the girl.

"And when, striking at you, they frightened her, they made her abdicate, so to speak. She lied to you because they told her that if she did not relinquish your claim you would not be alive, say, in twelve hours.

"In that, too, you will notice the working of an intelligence far above the average. They had studied this girl. Whoever is the big man in this case has been on the ground for a day at least.

"That would be enough for him. His first move would be to discover what sort of girl Inez Braddon was. Undoubtedly he discovered that she was loyal and very responsive to kindness."

"She was very grateful," Peterson said.

"Exactly. And so this intelligent criminal, instead of killing, as you suggested, struck through her loyalty. You say you told her you did not believe her.

"That was a tactical mistake on your part. Since you do not believe, this criminal will know that he must strike again in some different way."

"But how will he know that I did not believe?"

"Do you imagine he let the girl make her confession to you without having it listened to by one of his lieutenants. No; he would not miss so obvious a point."

"And how will he strike now?"

"I can't tell you that. You see, he is miles ahead of us in this game—many miles. He has time to ponder each move until he sees that we are catching up a little."

"Well, can't we get started?" Peterson asked, springing up.

"I will be in your office in the morning," said Cort. "Or at least by noon. I must have a few hours here."

"Don't fail me," Peterson said

"I will not fail you."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### DISAPPEARANCES.

PAUL CORT appeared at Peterson's office the next day at noon. He found the lawyer in a high state of perturbation.

"The girl has gone and Jack has gone!" Peterson cried

"Softly!" Cort said. "What do you know about it?"

"Early this morning I went to the girl's boarding-house. The landlady said she had left last evening just at dusk. She took her hand bag with her.

"Her bill was paid. She said nothing to the woman as to whether she would be back. I am afraid something terrible has happened to her!

"Jack was to have watched the house, you know. I am sure he was watching and saw her go. He was to follow her.

"I am equally sure that he did that. But I have no word from him. Do you suppose it is possible that they have done away with both of them."

"With Jack, perhaps. Hardly with the girl."

"Well, we must move quickly," said Peterson. "Have you seen the morning papers?"

Cort shook his head

"Your master criminal is losing no time," Peterson said. "He has had the girl and Dillingham go to Tracyville, where Quayle lived, and lay claim with Marsden, Quayle's attorney, to the fortune the old man left.

"They will have the girl established as the heiress in a very short time. Of course I can enter suit. I can force the girl to the stand. I can produce my depositions and the photograph of Braddon's grave."

"But you can't produce your heiress."

"No."

"I would do nothing for a little while," said Cort soothingly. "They will be as accountable for the fortune in a few days as they are now."

"What do you propose doing?" Peterson asked.

"I have just arrived," Cort said. "I want to look over the ground. You will hear from me in a short time."

He rose and started for the door. His back was to Peterson.

"If we don't get somewhere soon," Peterson said, "I shall institute suit. I won't take any long chances."

A shade of annoyance crossed Cort's face. He turned.

"Mr. Peterson," he said with dignity, "I shall have to ask you to restrain yourself a little. Your interest in this case is more than professional.

"You will pardon my saying so. If it were purely professional I could rely on your caution. But if we go to working in opposite directions we won't get anywhere.

"As I pointed out to you, this master-criminal is far ahead of us. We must overtake him. We must pass him.

"And we cannot pass him if the newspapers cry forth the moves we make. Do you believe that?"

"I know that is true," Peterson assented. "I will wait till I hear from you. But, for Heaven's sake, do your best!"

"I never do anything else."

"And if it comes to a question between the safety of the girl and the loss of the fortune, let the fortune go!"

"Of course her safety is the first consideration," Cort said; and he left.

As he emerged from the office-building a newsboy went by shrilling "All about de big murder mystery!"

Cort bought a paper. He folded it and carried it in his hand to his hotel. In his own room he spread it out on the table.

The newspaper was one of the flash afternoon variety. There was an "extra block" over the last two columns of the page, and beneath it a two-column head, reading:

**THEATRICAL AGENT FOUND MURDERED IN SWELL HOTEL.**

**Bullet Is Fired into Heart of Guest in His Room at the Amsterdam.**

**KILLED WHILE ASLEEP, IS THEORY OF POLICE.**

**Mystery Shrouds Death of H. M. Dryden of New York Firm of Producers.**

Then followed a much-padded story giving the details of the murder as the reporters had got them in the first crowded moments that had preceded the extra.

Dryden, it appeared, had been a guest of the hotel for several days. He was of the usual buoyant type of press-agent. He had appeared to be waiting for some one. He rarely left the hotel, but contented himself with hanging about the lobby, talking to chance acquaintances.

He was quite dead when found. Detectives decided from the position of the body that he had been shot while sleeping. They surmised the bedclothing had been used to deaden the sound of the bullet.

And so on to the bottom of the page, where the story closed with the statement that the police had no clues.

Cort, having finished reading, went to the wall-telephone and took down the receiver He called Peterson's number. Peterson answered.

"Seen the extras of the afternoon papers?" Cort asked.

"No, but I can hear the boys yelling."

"Dryden, the press-agent, has been murdered at the Amsterdam Hotel."

"What does that mean?"

"It may mean almost anything. That isn't the point.

"Do not be alarmed or mystified by anything you may see in the papers about me. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Good-by!"

Cort then called the hotel office.

"Send up a boy!" he ordered

He was waiting with his hand on the knob when the boy tapped on the door. He opened the door and handed the paper to the boy.

"Take this to Room 409," he said. "Ask for Miss Braddon. If the young woman who will probably come to the door says she is Miss Braddon hand her this paper and leave."

"Yes, sir."

The boy went down the corridor. To reach Laura Arnold's room he had to turn into another corridor. Cort gave him time to get out of sight.

Then he slipped from his room and ran after him. He heard a door opened, the voices of the boy and the girl, and then the door closed. He stood still.

He had waited barely half a minute when a woman's scream broke the cool stillness of the hotel. Cort ran forward toward the door of Miss Arnold's room.

As he did so a door across the hall was opened and a man came out. Further down the hall another door was opened. Another man came out.

The three men met almost at the door of the room from which the scream had come. The man who had come from across the hall put his hand on the door-knob and turned it.

The door gave. He stepped inside. The other man and Cort followed.

Laura was sitting in an armchair, her head resting on the back of it. She appeared to have fallen there. The newspaper was on the floor at her feet.

The man from across the hall laid his hand on her shoulder. She opened her eyes with a shudder.

"Mr. Quinn!" she gasped.

Her eyes roved to the other man.

"Mr Dillingham, Henry has been murdered!"

"Hush!" said Quinn. "You mustn't talk about it You must be quiet."

"It's awful!" she breathed. "It's terrible! I can't stand it! I must go to him!"

"But there is nothing you can do now," Dillingham interposed. "We will take care of him."

"Oh, oh! why did I ever—"

"You must be quiet, my dear!" said Dillingham soothingly. He turned to Cort.

"You will pardon us, sir, I am sure, but there has been a terrible crime! The young lady is somewhat unnerved. If you will excuse us. And if you would leave us and send a maid, Mr. Quinn!"

"Certainly," said Quinn.

He moved toward the door, and Cort followed him on tiptoe with that kind of subdued sympathy a stranger tries to show to an afflicted stranger.

Quinn closed the door

"I will go to the desk and have a maid sent up," he said

"I was just going down," said Cort. "After you have delivered your message perhaps you will join me at the bar. These things are rather confusing to a stranger."

"Gladly," said Quinn.

They went to the desk and then to the ornate barroom. They sat down at a table and a waiter came.

"Know who the young lady is?" Quinn asked when they had been served.

"No."

"She's Miss Inez Braddon, the heiress, that the papers have had so much about in the last few days."

"Indeed?" said Cort politely.

"Yes, I met her by accident. Charming girl but excitable!"

"From New York, are you?" Cort asked.

"Yes. My name's Quinn, of Quinn & Maxson, theatrical agents."

"Oh, yes. I've heard about you."

"You're from New York yourself?"

"Brooklyn. I'm in the real-estate business in a small way. Cort is my name."

"Glad to meet you."

And thus began the ordinary barroom

acquaintance. Quinn had begun to find things a little dull. Everything seemed smoothed away now.

There was little for him to do. He was companionable by nature, and he had scraped several acquaintances in the last few days.

"This man Dryden worked for you, didn't he?" Cort asked casually.

"Yes. Poor fellow, he was on his uppers and we gave him a job'"

"But you didn't know the young woman, though she knew Dryden?"

"Oh, these press-agents are likely to know almost anybody."

"She seemed more than just to know him."

"Seemed so. I don't know anything about it. Let's have another drink!"

As he spoke a man appeared in the doorway. Quinn raised his hand. The man came to the table.

"Mr. Cort," said Quinn, "meet Mr. Maxson, my partner. He just came on from New York this morning."

Cort rose. The two men faced each other. They shook hands without a word. It was as if something strange, telepathic, passed between them.

"Sit down, Maxson, and have a glass of water," said Quinn.

Maxson crowded up to the table.

In half an hour Cort excused himself, making it a point to promise Quinn he would see him in the evening. When they were alone the two partners glanced about warily.

"It's done," said Quinn.

"I've seen the papers," said Maxson. "How did she take it?"

"Rather hard at first; but she's more scared than anything else. You know how her kind are."

"Everything running smoothly?"

"Like oil. We'll be in the old man's treasury in a few days."

Maxson rose.

"I'll go up and change my clothes," he said. "See you at luncheon."

"All right," said Quinn, whose two drinks had loosened the surface springs of his nature. "Remember your failing. We'll have a couple before dinner."

Maxson went to the room he had been assigned to. The clerk had handed him an envelope, bearing the hotel mark. In his room Maxson tore open the envelope. There was a brief note inside.

It read:

> Dispose of Q. We must begin to tighten up fast from now on

There was no signature. Maxson put a match to the paper, and held it till it was burned to his finger-tips.

"That's what I say," he murmured. "He's beginning to hit the booze himself, in anticipation. He talks too much, anyway."

He called a man on the telephone in some obscure part of the city. Their talk was brief, and would have been unintelligible to any one else listening on the wire. This man passed the word to another. Then the word traveled fast.

Meantime Quinn sat in the barroom. His hands were shoved deep in his pockets, and there was a smile on his face as he contemplated the fourth drink the waiter had set before him since he had come in with Cort.

## CHAPTER XVII

### TWO WHO QUIT.

BOTH Quigley, the private detective, and the old chief of police were worried. The report of the murder of Henry Dryden had, of course, reached the ears of the chief before it reached those of Quigley.

The chief knew he had been walking on ice extremely thin. But he had been offered two hundred thousand dollars to participate in the scheme to get the Quayle millions.

He had saved a little money, and he would have his pension. But what he had saved and his pension meant merely a frugal living. He had looked forward to a desolate old age.

He had always wanted to see the world. Two hundred thousand dollars would permit him to roll in luxury.

But he had lived close to crime during

nearly the whole of his manhood. He had seen men sent to the penitentiary for life. He had seen them sentenced to death.

He had seen one man die in the chair. He had not expected that murder would enter into the conspiracy.

And so when murder did enter, he was shaken. He knew how surely that trail led to a man's door, however secure he might think himself to be.

Quigley, too, was to have had his two hundred thousand. He, too, knew what murder meant. In his time he had been a crook, and had done his stretch in "stir." He was a voluptuary—a lover of ease and comfort, and all the good things of life.

Like most men of that caliber, he was a physical coward. When he heard that Dryden had been murdered, he knew why, and he knew that the murder had been committed at the instigation of that intelligence which was directing every move in the game.

Quigley's worry grew till it was almost terror. He was afraid of nameless things—things which were not tangible enough to be seen or felt.

He grew rapidly to fear the man whose brain had conceived the Quayle conspiracy, and whose nerve was sufficient to carry it out, even to the point of destroying a man who was married to the woman claiming the fortune. Quigley had a vision of other murders.

It was close to dusk when the old chief went to Quigley's office. All afternoon Quigley had debated what to do, and could find no way out.

He did not want to go on with his part of the work, and yet he did not want to lose the two hundred thousand. He was still young, and he knew what he could buy with that much money

The chief passed the man who guarded Quigley's private door, and entered Quigley's office unannounced. Quigley looked up from his brooding with a start.

"Oh," he said, "it's you, eh?"

"Yes, it's me," the chief said, sinking heavily into a chair. "Say, you've seen the papers?"

"Yes, I've seen 'em, by Heaven, chief; I didn't think they'd go that far."

"Well, they've done it. It's a pretty mess. What 're you going to do, Quigley?"

"I wish I was well out of it.

The old chief was made of sterner stuff than the private detective.

"I'm going to have my money," he said.

"How're you going to get it?"

"Just ask for it."

"Will they come through? Maxson is in town, you know."

"I know he is. I'm on my way to see him. You'd better come along. And you'd better get out of this thing, Quigley, before they have you strapped in the chair."

"Cut that," said Quigley with a shudder. "I'm ready to quit."

"Well, come on, if you want to go with me."

The clerk at the hotel said Mr. Maxson was in his room. The chief said they would go up.

Maxson opened the door to them He started at sight of them.

"What do you want to come here for?" he demanded. "Didn't I tell you you'd get word if I wanted you?"

"We ain't waitin' for you to want us," the chief said. "We want you."

"Come in and sit down," Maxson said; and the two men entered the room.

"What is it?" Maxson demanded

"You've gone too far in this game," the chief said. "You told both of us that there wouldn't be any bloodshed. And now see what's happened to this man Dryden."

For a moment Maxson's heart stood still He was only an instrument in the game, and while he had courage of a sort, he had been carried off his feet by the rush with which his superior was carrying things through.

He alone knew who that superior was, and he had all along felt a big load of responsibility. If trouble came, his superior might disappear, and the others—those tools he himself had hired—might turn against him. Where would he be then? he had constantly asked himself.

"You're not going to quit, are you?" he asked.

"Just that," said the chief. "That's the word—quit. And quit cold, too."

Maxson sprang up. He was feeling that kind of terror which had been growing in Quigley all day.

He took a turn across the room, and came to a pause before the chief. There were fine beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"You haven't a warrant for—for anybody, have you, chief?" he asked.

The chief looked at the pallid face and trembling lips. He saw what his own play was to be.

"Not yet," he said in his gruffest tones; "but you fellows have gone too far. You've killed a man. It's my duty as chief of police to find out who killed Dryden."

Maxson sank into his chair again.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We'd quit and blow if we was used right," Quigley said

"How much apiece?"

"It was to be two hundred thousand apiece," Quigley said.

"When the work was done."

"We're inclined to be fair," the chief interposed. "We will cut it in two if you pay us at once."

"Then what will you do?" Maxson asked.

"Me for South America and a new name," said Quigley.

"You'll never see me again," the chief said with more caution.

Maxson considered. He had his men gaged now. He saw they were more anxious to get away than to do anything else. They were afraid.

"I think I can get you seventy five thousand apiece in an hour," he said. "Will you take that?"

There was silence in the room for a moment. Seventy-five thousand dollars! It was more money than the lifetime of the old chief had yielded him.

"It 'll do for me, if it's in my hands in an hour," he said.

"All right—in an hour," said Quigley.

"Come back in forty-five minutes," Maxson said.

When they had gone, Maxson sat down and wrote this note:

> Is it worth seventy-five thousand apiece to have Quigley and the chief blow? Or would you rather—

He called a boy and handed the note in a sealed envelope to him. The address was written on the envelope. The boy went away.

In twenty minutes he was back. He handed a sealed envelope to Maxson:

> Are you satisfied they will disappear?

And Maxson answered:

> Perfectly satisfied

Twenty minutes more passed. The chief and Quigley were in the barroom. Cort entered. He strolled up to the two men, and stood beside them as he ordered a drink.

The chief and Quigley had a couple of drinks. Quigley spoke to the chief twice.

Once the chief shook his head; the second time he nodded it. Cort wandered out of the barroom.

"You want to be careful," the chief cautioned. "A man was standin' right there at your elbow."

"I didn't see him," Quigley said

The chief looked at his watch.

"It's fifty minutes," he said. "Let's go back."

They crossed the lobby and went up in the elevator. Cort just then was deliberating over a cigar at the cigar-stand. He watched the two men pass.

"The chief of police and the city's most famous private detective," he said to himself with his mild smile

In his room Maxson was pacing back and forth. Fifty five minutes of the hour had passed.

There had been no answer to his second note.

He admitted Quigley and the chief. Dusk had fallen

A shaded light burned on Maxson's writing-table. But even in that dim light they saw that there was the pallor of death on his face.

"Got the money yet?" the chief asked.

"Not yet."

"What's the matter, man?" Quigley

asked. "You're shaking like a leaf. What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," Maxson answered. "He hasn't sent the money."

"Who in hell is this *he* that you're always talkin' about, and that you have never given a name to yet?" the chief demanded.

"Before I'd tell you, I'd cut my throat," Maxson said.

Outside, rain had been falling for some minutes. Now, quite suddenly there was a crash of thunder and a vivid flash of lightning. Maxson shut his lips on a cry.

"Man, you better have a drink," Quigley said. "What's the matter with you?"

"He hasn't come through with the money," Maxson breathed. "Maybe he won't come through.

"Maybe he doesn't need me any more. I've just been thinking of Henry Dryden—how he died—and of another—"

"Another? What other?" the chief asked

There was a knock on the door. Maxson sprang to it and threw it open. A boy in a dripping raincoat stood there.

"Letter for Mr. Maxson," he said. "Sign the book."

Maxson seized the envelope and scrawled his name. He tossed a quarter to the boy and closed the door.

"It's either come or it hasn't," he said. "If it isn't here, what 're you fellows going to do?"

"It 'd better be there," the chief growled.

Maxson walked to the writing-table and sat down. He held the envelope under the light while he slit the flap of it. The two men watched him with fascinated eyes. He peered into the envelope,

"Ah," he breathed.

He pulled out a sheet of note-paper. On it was written:

> Pay them. It's cheap at the price to get rid of them. We don't need them any more Everything is shaped now

Maxson rose and started for the telephone.

"How about the money?" Quigley gasped

"It's there," Maxson said "Let's order up a drink. I'm shaking all through my system."

He gave the order, and went back to the table. Picking up the envelope, he shook it over the table. Yellow bills fluttered out

Maxson counted them into two equal amounts. One roll he handed to Quigley; one to the chief. The men stowed the money away carefully. The drinks came, and they drank them in silence.

"When do you two make your getaway?" Maxson then asked.

"To-night for mine," said Quigley. "I'll dispose of my business by wire."

"I got to stay and resign," said the chief. "I got to make a show."

"Well, make it a one-act show," Maxson said.

"You're feelin' better, ain't you?" the chief sneered. "Well, you better look out. This *he* of yours will get you next."

They left Maxson staring after them as they closed the door.

"I wonder," said Maxson to himself. "I wonder."

He went down to the lobby. Quite by chance he ran into Cort.

"I was just going to have a before-dinner drink," Cort said. "Will you join me?"

"Don't mind if I do," Maxson said

They stood before the bar.

"I saw a man in here a while ago that somebody said was the chief of police," said Cort. "I suppose he's working on the Dryden mystery."

"He saw me," said Maxson. "He just left my room. I guess that mystery will never be solved"

"That so?" Cort said indifferently

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### ANOTHER MYSTERY FOR THE POLICE.

QUINN was passionately fond of life That is, he was fond of the smooth, easy ways of life. He hated worry; he hated work; he hated thought, except of the most superficial kind. He liked to think of himself as being always gay and

debonair. He knew he was handsome, and he had cultivated a kind of winning way, especially with women.

Beneath this superficial exterior lay inordinate vanity, a loose ambition, and a capability for hatred that would never become very intense, because that meant deep feeling, and of deep feeling he had none.

Maxson he held in a good deal of contempt. For fifteen years the two had been business buccaneers. They had played all sorts of games, keeping just within the law. They had specialized considerably in bucket-shops when bucket-shops flourished in the "provinces."

At one time they had had offices in several cities under a high-sounding company name. The company had a dummy board of directors and dummy officers. The proceeds were divided weekly between the two partners.

Quinn did not know that Maxson had always held him at his real worth—he was a good mixer, and that was all. Maxson supplied the brains, but he was wise enough not to let Quinn know that.

On the night when the chief and Quigley slipped out of the far-flung organization that was seeking the Quayle fortune, Quinn was having a good time in his own way.

He saw no reason why he should not have a good time. So far as he could see, his share in the Quayle millions was already in his grasp. He had been plentifully supplied with money from the source from which Maxson mysteriously got it.

Quinn did not know what this source was, nor did he care. It was sufficient for him that he was "well heeled," as he phrased it.

Quinn, in a taxicab as protection from the driving rain, had been going from café to café, from saloon to saloon. Here and there he met men who would drink with him, and he spent money with a liberal hand.

By eleven o'clock he was in that highly exhilarated stage which precedes either sleep or a change of mood. He felt hungry, and he ordered the driver to take him to some cheerful, high-priced dining room

In a brief time he found himself at table in just such a place as he would have chosen if he had known the city better. It was a big, softly lighted room with evidences of luxury on every hand.

The waiters were artists. The food, as he saw it served, seemed to Quinn to be all that could be asked for. The wine-list was beyond reproach. A hidden orchestra insinuated its subdued melody into the varying moods of the diners.

Quinn ordered an elaborate meal for that time of night, lit a cigarette, and leaned back in his chair. His dreams were rosy.

One million dollars! One million dollars for Quinn, who had always had to fight so hard for every cent that came his way.

What a prospect it opened up before him. He could have anything—everything his heart desired.

Like a moving picture, the story spread itself out before him. There was Maxson first broaching the matter of the Quayle fortune to Quinn. Maxson had information that Quayle had relented toward his granddaughter, and had detectives looking for her.

Maxson knew the whole Quayle story: how the daughter had been married against the father's wishes; how the father had disowned her; how a child had been born; how the daughter and her husband had died.

It had been interesting enough, offering possibilities, but Quinn had told Maxson he didn't see how he and Maxson could get in on it.

Then, one day, Maxson had come to him with more money than either of them had seen in many a day. They were to go to work at once. They were to work under the direction of the man from whom Maxson had got the money. Maxson wouldn't say who the man was, but Quinn hadn't cared. They had the money, and there was more in prospect.

There had been several weeks when Quinn had had nothing to do. But Maxson had been prodigiously busy. Out of nowhere there had sprung, as Quinn only glimpsed it, a marvelous organization.

Quinn found himself established with Maxson in well fitted offices. They were theatrical agents. Dryden was in their employ, and had been sent on what seemed to

Quinn to be a wild-goose chase. He had come back with a girl, and with proofs that this girl was Inez Braddon.

The organization reached out. Thugs of varying degrees of intelligence were hired. Photographers were bribed.

The chief of police and Quigley, as Quinn had forced Maxson since to confess, had been put on the pay-roll. Even to the facile Quinn it was marvelous work. And he did not give Maxson credit for it.

More than once he had asked whom Maxson represented, but on that point Maxson was silent. Nothing could wring a word from him.

Then there had come the developments of the last few days. Quinn, dreaming in his pleasant room, thought of the death of Henry Dryden. Quinn had not liked that. He had not known that it was contemplated till Laura's scream had brought him to her room and to knowledge of what had caused the outcry.

But Quinn knew now why Dryden had been murdered. There were two reasons: he was too much on the inside and he was married to Laura.

Quinn himself was to be Laura's husband, though Laura did not know that as yet. That was to be the final play. When Laura had been established as the heiress and had married Quinn, a decent proposition was to be made to her.

If she accepted the proposition, all would be well with her. If she did not—well, there was the fate of Dryden, her husband. Quinn guessed she would listen to reason.

And as he dreamed there, the rain was still driving down outside the restaurant. The driver of the taxicab had cast longing glances into the room. He could see that Quinn had ordered a meal, and he had a notion to go and get a bite for himself.

But he hadn't been paid for the evening, and he knew how changeable some gents could be. So he sat on his seat.

Footsteps came rapidly down the sidewalk. Two men stopped at the side of the cab. They wore long, light raincoats, and their hats were drawn down over their eyes.

"Son, we want to get out to M Street right away," one said in a throaty voice. "Can you take us?"

"Got a fare in the restaurant already," the driver returned.

"Ten bucks in it for you if you'll take us," the man said

The driver hesitated. He looked through the window and saw that Quinn was just being served with his food.

Ten dollars added to his present fare would make a fine night's work. The ten he could keep for himself.

"Get in," he said.

The two men climbed in. The driver started the car. He came into a main thoroughfare.

Straight ahead of him, three miles away, was M Street. Even on these slippery pavements he could make it in a few minutes. He ignored the slipperiness and let out his car

He came to his destination and stopped. The night was dark. The car stood beneath the wide-spreading trees. There was no one in sight.

One of the men stepped from the cab. He handed a bill up to the driver. The driver looked at it.

It was a ten. He shoved it into his pocket.

"Say," the man below him said, "I'm sorry, but my pal has been hittin' it up pretty hard and he's dead to the world. Will you help me to get him out?

"I didn't know he was so far gone. I can walk him into the house all right. We live right here."

"Sure," said the driver, his heart warmed by that ten-dollar bill.

He climbed down from the seat and stepped to the side of his passenger. The man reached into the cab and roughly shook his companion.

"Wake up, Bill," he said. "We're home"

The man in the cab murmured and stretched himself. He wanted to know what his friend had said. The friend repeated that they were home.

"Oh, a' ri'," the other man said.

He got up and wavered for a moment on his feet. The driver stretched out and took him by the arm. He leaned heavily on the driver, who stepped back as the passenger stepped down.

He was weak in the knees, and he leaned heavily on the driver, clinging to him. Then suddenly his arms tightened about the driver's with an iron clasp. The man felt something strike him in the back of the head—and that was the last that he knew.

One of the men sprang to the box; the other jumped into the cab and slammed the door. Neither spoke.

The new driver wheeled the cab about and sped toward the lights of the city. The former driver lay quietly in the darkness under the spreading tree.

In the restaurant, Quinn had dined very well. He had eaten choice food, drunk a bottle of champagne, and now a fine cigar was between his lips.

He tipped the waiter generously and went outside. His cab waited for him. He stepped into it.

"The rain has stopped, sir," the driver said. "Care to take a little ride out the avenue? It's very warm and nice after the rain."

"Don't care if I do," said Quinn. "Good idea."

The cab whirled away. Quinn was a little drunker than he had thought. He sprawled back in his seat and chewed on his cigar.

He felt sleepy. He looked out hazily at the lights that were whirling by.

He supposed the driver would turn after a bit and take him back to his hotel. He had had a fine night, and he was ready now to turn in. But the cab kept on.

"Better turn back now," he called to the driver. "I want to go to bed."

"Yes, sir," the driver said.

He kept on for a block. Then he suddenly turned. Quinn swayed in his seat

He looked out, but could see nothing. Everything was shut out by overhanging trees. He judged he was passing through a park.

Suddenly the car ground to a stop. Quinn was almost thrown against the front of the car. He took his cigar from his lips and cursed fluently.

"What 're you trying to do?" he demanded of the driver.

The driver climbed down.

"Something gone wrong with the mechanism, sir," he said smoothly. "Have it fixed in a minute, I hope."

"You better," said Quinn. "If you don't, you can send for another car."

"Yes, sir. I will, sir."

For several minutes the driver tinkered somewhere about the machine. Then he came to the side of it.

"Would you mind holding the light for me for just a minute, sir?" he asked. "Then we can start."

"I'm no mechanic," said Quinn sulkily. "But I suppose I must."

He stepped to the pavement. Suddenly a light was flashed into his eyes, blinding him. The light was withdrawn.

"What—" he began.

Something soft and smothery was suddenly thrown over his head. A hand pressed through this and found his mouth. His cry died before it could be uttered.

He felt a sharp, hot pain between his left ribs.

Something warm seemed to be flowing out of his side. He struggled a little, but was firmly held

He felt himself growing very weak. He relaxed into the arms of his assailants. Then there was nothing but darkness.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CORT called on Peterson the next morning. He found the lawyer much perturbed.

"You were wrong in at least one of your inferences, weren't you?" Peterson asked.

"Which one?"

"You said this master criminal of yours would not kill."

"I said he would not kill unless he were forced to," Cort returned. "Evidently circumstances have arisen which make killing necessary."

"You have heard that the chief resigned this morning?"

"Yes; and Quigley, too, is gone."

"The chief will flee?"

"Assuredly."

"But is that right?" Peterson asked.

"Should we let these men get away if they are as guilty as you assume?"

"As guilty as I know them to be," Cort corrected.

"As you know them to be. Is it right?"

"Ethically, it is not right. But we cannot cumber ourselves. We have too much to do.

We must find Miss Braddon, and we still have the leader to deal with. He will keep us busy, I fancy. Something has happened to make him change his plans.

He is getting rid of every man that knows anything. On a guess, I should say that he had yielded to avarice. There were too many divisions of the fortune to be made. In the end, if his plans succeed, it will all be his."

"That means more killing."

"Doubtless."

"Well, what of me?" Peterson demanded. "I know a little, and they know I know a little."

"You are safe for the present," Cort assured him. "They still need you alive. Unless they suddenly decide to kill Miss Braddon, they still need you to influence her."

"Might they kill her?" Peterson asked.

"I think not—not at present, at least. You must remember that she is the real heiress to the fortune. This master criminal will hold her so that if his plans go awry with the woman he has advanced as the claimant, he will still have the real claimant in his power.

"No, I should say that your life and Miss Braddon's are entirely safe for the present. You must remember that this man is not a common crook. He is very far seeing.

"Human life seems to matter little to him, unless it is valuable to himself. Both you and Miss Braddon are still valuable."

"I am glad to hear you say that," Peterson said. "I am not afraid for myself, but I should hate to see harm come to that girl. I tell you that frankly."

"I understand," said Cort.

Through the open windows of Peterson's office came the cry of an excited newsboy.

"Better send out for a paper," Cort said.

Peterson did so. The paper, still damp from the press, was laid on his desk. He glanced at it.

"Quinn has been murdered!" he gasped. "His body was found in a taxicab in a park this morning. They have no clues."

"Quinn had outlived his usefulness," Cort said. "None remain now but Maxson, whoever is back of Maxson, and those hired thugs, who do not count.

"Hour by hour the circle grows smaller. Our work will be easier from now on."

"I had a letter from Marsden this morning," said Peterson. "He says he is satisfied that Laura Arnold is Miss Braddon. The estate will undoubtedly be turned over to the girl in a few days."

"Let it be," said Cort. "Forty-eight hours will bring developments one way or the other."

"What is your expectation of ultimate success?"

"I am working with absolute certainty toward the end," Cort said calmly. "I know just what I am about to do."

"And what is that?"

"You will know when the end comes," Cort said.

Cort left. Peterson made an effort to keep busy, but it was a painful effort

His mind constantly dwelt on Inez Braddon. In spite of Cort's assurances, he could not help thinking that harm had come to her. It made him sick to think of her being at the mercy of a gang that appeared to stop at nothing—a gang that worked with the precision of a machine, guided by a powerful hand.

He had his luncheon sent to his office and ate it there. He went home at six o'clock. He ate his dinner, as was his custom, alone in his big dining-room.

The servant came and went with noiseless tread. Peterson ate sparingly. The servant put cigars at his plate. He selected one, and the servant held a match to it.

Peterson went to his library. Night had fallen and lay soft against the big windows overlooking the east lawn.

There was no air. Silence wrapped the place. Not even the hum of the city reached this far.

Peterson tried to read a law-book. It was too dull. He tried a novel. It failed

to hold him. His thoughts kept turning to the missing girl.

He put the book aside, opened a window, and stepped out on the porch. The moon was just coming up over the eastern hills. Slowly the darkness receded before its pale light.

The earth was bathed in silver. Shrubs and trees stood out, motionless. The air was heavy with the scents of summer.

"If she were only here," Peterson said. "Will she ever be here, I wonder? Even if she is safe, will she ever be here?"

He cast his cigar out on the lawn and watched it glow for a moment and then die. Then he went inside and wearily climbed the broad stairs. He turned on a single light on his dressing table, and proceeded to get ready for bed.

In fifteen minutes he lay stretched out on his bed. He had thought he was a little sleepy, but now his brain was racing and his eyes were wide open, staring into the dark.

A thousand notions raced through his brain. Why hadn't he married Inez, if she would have married him, and let the Quayle millions go?

He had enough for himself and her, and he could earn much more. Ambitions which he had nurtured for years came to torture him

He wanted at some future time to sit on the bench. Working for Inez, he might easily have accomplished that. Money and honor in plenty they would have had. Why hadn't he let this fantom master criminal go his way?

And then he knew that Inez would not have consented to that. She was proud. She was a fighter. Well, he had always thought he was a fighter himself, but he had fought to no effect thus far.

There was a faint stir of air in the room, and he moved so that he might get the benefit of it. He felt hot and oppressed. What if he should be taken ill just now when she might need him most.

The window-shade moved and struck against the casing. Peterson started. The noise to him had seemed very loud.

"I'm getting nerves," he told himself. "I'd better go to sleep."

He turned on his side, and made that desperate but futile effort to sleep which the troubled in spirit make. The window-shade flapped again. He started, but did not open his eyes.

Then through the room came another kind of noise. He felt the breeze freshen His eyes flew open. He lay still and listened. There was no further sound, but there was a steady current of air through the room.

He raised his head and looked at the door, which was directly opposite the window. He knew he had closed the door. He never left it open, but it was open now

He moved to rise and close it, and then he lay still again. He was well aware that when that door was clicked shut the wind could not possibly blow it open. The catch was large and strong.

His mind worked fast. He knew he was in peril, in spite of Cort's analysis of the present situation.

Was he to be the object of a night attack, as Quinn had been?

In his dresser drawer lay an automatic pistol, but there was a space of three feet between the bed and the drawer. If some one had crept into his room, that some one was now at the foot of his bed.

He would be intercepted. But, he decided in a flash, it would be better to die on his feet than to be stabbed to death in his bed.

He pushed back the sheet and hunched up his body. For a breath he listened. There was no sound in the room except that made by the curtain, now more than ever agitated.

Peterson sprang. He landed within two feet of the dresser. He took one step and his hand was on the top of it.

He fumbled for the drawer. And then two men rose from the foot of the bed. Something bright gleamed in the little light there was in the room.

"Stop right where you are," said a low voice. "If you open that drawer I'll fire. You know I will, too."

**(To Be Concluded NEXT WEEK.)**

# A REVERSAL OF FORM.

BY H. KEITH TRASK.

**C. Claude Clifford Wanted to Play a Real Man's Game So He Shipped Aboard a Tug. Then—Things Happened.**

CLAUDE CLIFFORD was escorted home from his Aunt Martha's funeral by his boss, President Smythe, of the People's National Bank. C. Claude would have dodged Mr. Smythe as he had sidestepped invitations to the midday meal from no less than seven of the first families of Elizabethtown, but the president was no easy man to shake off.

As sole relative and chief mourner for Aunt Martha, who had been reputed the richest spinster in the county, Claude had been the center of interest at church and cemetery. The news had leaked out that Aunt Martha had left him all her earthly possessions.

With President Smythe at his heels, he entered the tightly closed house. Once the front door was shut, he heaved a great sigh of relief

No one but he who is cursed with the same shyness and timidity that habitually rode C. Claude can picture what he had suffered throughout the obsequies.

Claude left the president sitting in the parlor where Aunt Martha had been enthroned more years than he could remember, and retired to the kitchen, unwinding from his neck as he went the red knitted comforter that Aunt Martha had always insisted that he wear when venturing abroad in inclement weather

With the kitchen door safely locked behind him, he opened the stove and jammed the comforter therein. The fire was out. He would attend to the actual cremation later, when the odor of burning wool would require no explanations.

Thereafter, he stretched his arms above his head, inflated his chest, and expelled his breath in a mighty "Whoof!" It was a solemn act, symbolical of a new order in Claude's life.

Then, though the day was raw and wet, he opened all the kitchen windows—wide.

Returning to the parlor, he performed the same rite in the dining-room, *en passant*, and finally in that solemn apartment itself; to the manifest discomposure of Elizabethtown's chief financial luminary. Mr. Smythe opened his mouth as if to protest, but seemed to think better of it; as if he realized that, in the throes of a great grief, Claude should be humored, even at the risk of pneumonia to them both.

"Well, Claude, your beloved aunt is no longer with us," he remarked instead, wagging his head sadly.

"No, she isn't," Claude agreed in a lifeless tone.

His hour had come, and he was scared to death. He didn't see how he was ever going to carry out his resolution.

"You're alone in the world now," Smythe continued, crossing his legs and accurately adjusting his thumbs and forefingers to the similitude of a letter A, projecting in front of his chest.

"Alone in the world," he repeated unctuously. "Alone in the world—with an exceedingly comfortable income, aside from your salary from the bank."

"Yes, I'm *alone*," Claude acquiesced, with a heavy and peculiar emphasis on the last word

"You should marry, my boy," Smythe told him. "It is time you had a home of your own and—er—loved ones around you. They are a great comfort, especially girls"

Claude maintained a non-committal silence, thinking of President Smythe's four

daughters. In certain respects, the eldest already resembled Aunt Martha as he remembered her in his early childhood.

"With your position in the bank," his boss went on, "there is no reason why you should not choose where you will in Elizabethtown. I have always liked you, Claude, and the officers of the bank -"

"I—I'm through with the bank," Claude interrupted in a burst of stammering words.

Then, with his heart beating wildly, and a suffocating sensation in his throat, he sat bolt upright in his chair, staring at the mottling countenance of the great man in a fascination of terror.

"You're through—with—the—bank!" J. Augustus Smythe repeated after him in a tone of utter disbelief.

C Claude Clifford detained the last remnants of his rapidly oozing courage by a desperate exercise of will-power. He rose and confronted Smythe, his slight figure drawn up to its full six feet two, head up, shoulders squared, and both fists clenched at his sides.

"I'm through with the bank!" he repeated firmly. "I resign—right here and now. I'm through with Elizabethtown. I'm through with all the piddling, tiddling trivialities that have been my life heretofore!

"A bank is all right. Lots of good men, real men, work in banks. But not me! Hereafter I'm going to be my own kind of man—and I won't fool with ledgers and discounts all day. I hate it!"

"But—but your sainted Aunt Martha—" gasped J. Augustus Smythe.

The revolutionist made a large gesture of dismissal.

"What did my Aunt Martha ever know of me? Or of my ambitions? What could she know of a man's life?" he demanded.

"When I was a boy, would she ever let me play with the other kids? No! I might have sneaked away and gone to a circus. I might have learned to swear, or even to smoke cigarettes!"

"But—but " the president essayed again, feebly

He was sitting now well forward in his chair, his hands grasping the arms, his pop eyes fixed on Claude.

"I wanted to go to the Naval Academy—and she forced me into the bank," the young man went on in a tone of deepening bitterness. "She made me wear that comforter in bad weather. The roughest game she would let me play was tennis.

"I know it's been partly my fault. I let her. But what else could I do? All my life she has dominated me. Her will has smothered mine

"I couldn't seem to fight it. Now, she's gone, and I'm through with this place and everything I've hated!"

He sank back, glaring defiance at Smythe.

The president fumbled for his hat, rose, and jammed it upon his head.

"You're not yourself, Claude," he stated severely. "Your grief has temporarily overwhelmed your reason. When you have calmed down, come and talk to me in the bank."

Therewith he departed in offended majesty.

For long after the door had slammed on J. Augustus Smythe, Claude sat in the parlor, racked by panic. He must indeed have been crazy to have dared such a declaration of independence.

Once divorced from the People's National, what was left in life for him? Where should he find another position?

To be sure, he didn't have to work. Smythe couldn't deprive him of his legacy. But that course didn't square with his desires.

He wanted to work, he yearned to be a man's man; to mix in the hurly-burly and rough stuff. He had dreamed a raw-beef and buckets-of-blood life.

Oh, if he had only defied Aunt Martha and secured that Annapolis appointment! The navy—that was the place for a he-man. Alas, too late for repining now. What was left?

He might go to the city and secure a position in one of the great metropolitan institutions—develop eventually into a buccaneer of finance, shearing the lambs of Wall Street. Pah! As bad as the People's National'

All Elizabethtown ate its midday dinner. In many homes the feminine element mourned that Claude Clifford's grief had

been too great to find consolation from sympathetic hearts.

And while his friends worried on his behalf, C. Claude Clifford groped for the solution of his problem. The house choked him. He could not decide, in the very room where Aunt Martha had so often checked incipient revolt.

He took his hat and fled out into the cold and wet, heedless of the overcoat neglected on the hall rack.

Of habit, his feet took him toward the bank. He had mounted the first step when President Smythe's bald head, seen over the wire screen in the front window, jarred upon his consciousness.

He turned and fled, away from the town, over the low hills that lay between him and Port Sagamore Sound.

So nearly had the old life again smothered him in its dull meshes of entangling routine. Never again would he enter that bank! He would move his account elsewhere.

Once he had nerved himself to defy its president. But let Smythe have another chance at him and he knew he would be trapped; snatched back to his prison behind the bars of a teller's window.

At the crest of the last hill, overlooking the sound, Claude halted his breathless flight, exhausted mentally by the emotions that had racked him, panting with his swift rush of escape

From here the road ran downward through Port Sagamore town, clinging to the hillside. At the foot of the slope lay the network of tracks, the covered piers and coal-trestles of the Shore Line Railroad's seaboard terminal.

Often before in his sedate walks after banking-hours had Claude looked down thus on Port Sagamore terminal. And always it had called him, but never with the same seductive, insistent call of this afternoon

The rain was over. Through a rift in the clouds the westering sun broke out and gilded the dingy structures with a yellow glory. The car-floats and barges, loading at the piers, it touched with the magic finger of romance.

Directly beneath his feet lay a tramp steamer, her cargo-booms ceaselessly swinging their loads from pier to hold. Suddenly, as he looked, a gush of steam vapor enveloped her midship deck-house. It rose high in air, a shredding cloud shot through with rainbow colorings that matched Claude's dreams

The sea! That was the place for a man of action; a man of force, ready to meet and conquer the direst emergency of wreck or mutiny or piracy. He pictured himself quelling a panic among the firemen of a leaking steamer, standing at bay with his back to a boiler and driving the cowards to their work with a slice-bar.

Out in midstream one of the road's big ocean-going tugs was marshaling her barges. The sun, flashing from a window of her deckhouse, seemed to heliograph a message to Claude

She was bound out to blue water, to Boston, or Portland, Maine, or mayhap Halifax. Two puffs of steam jetted from her whistle. The toots reached him faintly

"Come on!" they seemed to call, confirming the invitation of the flashing window.

Answering the call, Claude moved on down the hill. He would go and stand close alongside that tramp steamer. He would listen to the song of her cargo-winches, perhaps even touch her rusty sides, and thus establish vicarious contact with the far places of the earth.

At the entrance of the pier he encountered a pitiful procession. Men, several of them with their faces and hands reddened and blistered as if by burns, slowly emerged into the afternoon sunlight. They bore three stretchers, and the burdens on the stretchers were concealed by blankets.

As the last one passed Claude the blanket flopped away from one end. He caught a glimpse of a face distorted by the agonies of hell — he staggered, leaned against the pier-shed, faint and sick.

A rough-looking man, equipped with badge and club, addressed him, not unkindly:

"What's the matter, young feller; ain't you feelin' good?"

"No!" Claude admitted with a shudder. "I feel—for Heaven's sake, what hap-

pened to those men?" he burst out. "That face—"

"Is that all ails you?" the watchman grunted. "They was only three firemen off that tramp. A bum boiler-tube got 'em."

"Oh!" Claude gasped. "Couldn't they —didn't they know in time to get away?"

The watchman made a noise that was more a bark than a laugh.

"When steam takes a notion to bust loose, she don't give no warnin'," he stated curtly. Then he pointed to his own countenance, disfigured by a great, white scar that drew one side into a hideous leer.

"See that? I was lookin' through a fire-door right at the tube that let go and handed that to me. Believe me, young feller, I didn't have no warnin', or I wouldn't 'a' been there!"

He gave Claude a sudden, suspicious glance.

"Look here, are you a reporter?"

"Oh, no, a bank teller," Claude hastened to reassure him.

"Better beat it, anyhow," the watchman told him. "They don't like people rubberin' around here after an accident."

Shaken and horrified, with that face on the stretcher dancing before his eyes, Claude moved away. This was one phase of seagoing that he had never considered.

Death and maiming! And what a death! No heroics, no giving one's life to save others—"only three firemen off that tramp"—just three humble firemen, keeping up steam to drive cargo-winches, and wiped out by a defective boiler-tube.

Moored to the bulkhead between two piers lay another of the road's ocean towboats, waiting for the loading of her barges to be completed. Mechanically Claude read the name that stretched around the front of her pilot-house in big, gilt letters—Escort.

He went and sat down on the stringpiece, looking at her. Her deckhouse was gay with red paint and brass-rimmed portholes. The towing engine and great bitts aft were immaculate, picked out with black and green paint. The great steel and hemp hawsers were coiled on gratings that rested on decks scoured white.

Through a forward door of her deckhouse he caught a glimpse of her galley; the range polished like the towing engine, the floor white to match the deck. A man in a cook's cap and spotless apron was making apple-pies at the table.

Claude caught the incense from the old brier pipe he puffed deliberately as he rolled out the crisp crust.

Aft of the galley another door revealed a grated platform, an ash-hoist, the uptake from the boilers to the stack. Still further aft Claude saw polished cylinder-jackets, a maze of rods and copper piping, all the complicated mysteries of the propelling machinery.

How neat it all was—and how peaceful. There was enormous power, perfectly controlled.

He was suddenly ashamed of his late emotion. That cook was not worrying about any sudden disaster. His mind was on pies.

And himself, C. Claude Clifford, aspirant to he-manhood, had turned sick like a nervous woman at the sight of death. Of course men sometimes had to meet violent deaths at sea.

But that was exceptional. That didn't mean that anything would ever happen to him.

Two voices in violent altercation intruded upon his thoughts. Then there erupted through the engine-room door a swarthy individual, esthetically clad in dungaree trousers, a coat of weird cut and hue, and a green fedora hat.

He was grasping a near-leather suit-case, and he leaped from the tug's deck to the pier with the agile grace of an untamed kangaroo in his native wilds, leaving behind him a trail of sizzling language in a foreign tongue

Behind him followed a second man, also in violent eruption, but of entirely intelligible United States. This second performer halted on deck and contented himself with farther pursuit in verbiage only.

Claude looked and listened in wild-eyed delight, all his doubts and fears forgotten. Here was *the* he-man stuff

A third actor entered from the officers' quarters behind the wheelhouse. Shirt-sleeved and smoking a long cigar, he

lounged to the upper-deck rail, appearing to take a purely academic interest in the proceedings.

"I see you've fired that Maltese, Mr. Macnamara," he observed to the human volcano on the main deck. "I'm afraid you'll be short an oiler this trip. We won't have time to get another one from the office."

C. Claude Clifford looked up at the bronzed face of the speaker with awe and admiration. This must be the old man, the captain in the flesh.

Never before had he heard a sea captain speak. And this one spoke just as the books would have him.

"I don't care if I am," Mr. Macnamara asserted loudly. "I don't want that dog of dubious and unprintable antecedents!"

Finding himself unpursued, the Maltese had halted on the pier. Unwisely switching from his native tongue to English, he hurled the insult back at his late chief engineer.

"Dog you'self, you ——!"

"What's that?" Mr. Macnamara roared, leaping to the pier.

Shoulders hunched belligerently, he strode up to the discharged oiler.

"Say that again!" he requested.

"You no dare touch me," the Maltese taunted. "You do, I call a cop an' get you peench'!"

Then he repeated the epithet.

"I'll give him something to pinch me for, then!" Mr. Macnamara declared. He made a lightning play with his fists, the Maltese defending himself clumsily.

"Oh, fine knock the block off him!" Claude exhorted, jumping to his feet in a frenzy of excitement.

He saw the Maltese nose suddenly flatten on the Maltese face. He saw a spurt of rich, purple-red liquid. This was his first fight—and it was *great!*

The oiler swayed where he stood. There was something comic about the outraged indignation on his damaged features that made Claude laugh hysterically. He wasn't sorry for the fellow a bit, he had brought this upon himself.

Then the Maltese flopped in a formless heap, and Mr. Macnamara strolled back to the stringpiece, calmly wiping from his knuckles with a red bandanna handkerchief blood that was not his own.

All his life Claude had been taught that fighting, especially fist-fighting, was disgusting, the ultimate degradation to which man might sink. He had often pictured such a fight; the thud of fists against bare flesh, the savage grunts and curses—and he had recoiled.

The bare thought of the close and degrading physical contact, to say nothing of the reception and infliction of painful blows, had revolted him.

But Aunt Martha had been wrong about fighting—as wrong as she had been about Annapolis. Now he had seen a fight; a felonious assault upon that tenderly nurtured flower of commerce—a merchant seaman. And it was not indignant protest against the outrage that brought eager words to his lips.

He did not realize that Mr. Macnamara had violated the law, nor that he had behaved unethically. In the books Claude had read, ships' officers beat up fractious members of the crew as a matter of routine.

It was the swift neatness of the job that enthralled him. Fighting looked easy, when you learned the trick. Hit first and take the other fellow off his guard apparently summed up the art.

Here before him, poised on the stringpiece to leap back aboard the Escort, was a bucko officer of the old school. One of the real, romantic kind.

Forgotten was that pathetic procession from the tramp steamer. Claude was suddenly atingle with excitement and eagerness. What a privilege it would be to serve under this man

That is, it would be a privilege, provided one were careful to do one's duty and give no cause for offense, as had that foolish foreigner lying prostrate on the paving.

He touched Mr. Macnamara on the arm.

"I understand you need an oiler," he suggested, trying to put a touch of swaggering indifference into his voice.

"I do. That one's no good any more," the chief engineer agreed, nodding toward the prostrate Maltese. He appraised Claude searchingly.

"You ain't no oiler."

"No, but I want to be," Claude answered boldly enough, though inwardly quailing from the chief's belligerent stare.

"Say 'sir' to me!" Macnamara bellowed.

Then he regarded Claude again, doubt written large upon his countenance.

"All right, come aboard and see the skipper. You can't be much worse than the scum I been gettin'," he decided.

As Claude followed him up the ladder to the captain's quarters, the setting sun touched his face with glowing red. It was as the reflection of the burning of the last of the bridges between C. Claude Clifford and the People's National.

There was barely time for a hurried supper before the Escort pulled her barges out into the sound. Claude found himself hurled into the engine-room to stand the eight to twelve watch with Mr. Macnamara.

On tugs there is not the rigid formality of larger vessels. The chief engineer, like his two assistants, does his four hours of watch-duty twice a day.

While the tow was being lined out, Mr. Macnamara was fully occupied with his engines. Claude watch him a while, filled with admiration

Then he diverted his attention to the machinery. How wildly those great cranks flung around, driven by the connecting-rods. They were awe-inspiring—and did not strike him as altogether safe.

Suppose one should suddenly snap—it seemed wiser not to stand directly in line with them.

He drifted into the fire room and watched the two men feeding the furnaces, their faces white and pinched in the incandescent glow. That watchman on the pier must have been bending forward in precisely that way when he was scarred.

The steam-gages registered one hundred and eighty pounds to the square inch. A mighty force of destruction to be confined by the thin shells of those boilers!

Unwelcome and unbidden, a face interposed between his eyes and the gage dials—a face distorted by the agonies of hell—steam gave no warning. At any moment, like lightning from the skies—

Claude stepped quickly toward the bulkhead door the chief might be wanting him in the engine-room.

Came a sudden loud *pop!* in the fire-room behind him, a shouted oath, the vicious hiss of escaping steam.

It had come!

"Run for your life—she's going to blow up!" he shrieked.

He plunged madly into the engine-room and grabbed at the chief.

Mr. Macnamara thrust him roughly backward, then spat into the crank-pit, entirely unmoved by the commotion that had ceased as suddenly as it broke out.

"You'll make a peach of an oiler—lettin' a busted water-gage glass shake the feathers outa you like that!" he observed scornfully.

The jingle rang for full speed ahead. Mr. Macnamara gave his engines all the throttle. For half a minute he stood poised, head cocked to one side, listening to their rhythmical beat. Satisfied that all was well, he addressed Claude.

"Come on now, Feathers. Let's see if you got guts enough in you to learn your job."

The work that Claude had to do was not complicated, but required a certain dexterity that he totally lacked, and Mr. Macnamara was not a patient mentor. The water-glass episode, coupled with the neophyte's clumsy ineptitude, furnished him with inexhaustible material for obloquious comment.

Claude bore it in shamefaced silence. He had made a fool of himself, he knew. But Macnamara needn't rub it in quite so hard.

He was a greenhorn, the glass had broken very suddenly—and Macnamara hadn't seen that face of the stretcher. Toward the end of the watch he began to resent the contumely heaped upon him.

Why shouldn't the man give him time? Once he had become accustomed to his surroundings, he could conquer that haunting, nervous fear that now took part of his attention from his work.

When they went on deck at the midnight relief, the tow was still in the quiet waters of the lower bay ship-channel, the barges stretching out behind the tug at the end of two hundred fathoms of hawser.

The chief led Claude to the port side and showed him a bunk, one of three in a cubby-hole in the deckhouse.

"That's where you doss down," quoth he.

The bunk was stripped of furnishings, just a bare, steel box.

"Who'll give me sheets and things?" Claude queried innocently.

Mr. Macnamara's face, as seen by the light of the smudged electric globe in the ceiling, was a study.

"*Sheets!*" he breathed.

Then he gulped.

"Just telephone the office to send you a chambermaid," he directed in a voice of elaborate courtesy. "Sorry I overlooked it and say, while you're at it, have 'em send me ice-water."

Claude's gloom lightened at once. Manifestly, this must be persiflage. There were no chambermaids and no telephones aboard the Escort.

He had feared that the water-glass might have made a permanently bad impression upon Mr. Macnamara. But now it seemed that the chief wished to atone for his former rudeness.

Obviously, Claude's cue was to adopt the same tone and let bygones go -if he wanted to stand well with this bucko officer.

"Sure, I'll do that little thing," he promised. "But, joking aside, old man, who will give me things to sleep in?"

"*Old man!* Say 'sir,' you much-qualified, feather-stuffed hayseed!"

"Sir," Claude amended hastily.

"It's no skin off my nose if you never get anything to sleep in," his superior officer asserted, then stalked away to his own quarters and slammed the door behind him.

Lying cold and comfortless in that steel box, Claude's soul sank into the depths. Mad he must be, as J. Augustus Smythe had declared him. Mad indeed, to have put himself in the power of this unfeeling brute. Madder still to have planted himself deliberately alongside a powder magazine

Less than three-quarters of an inch of steel wall separated him from the boilers. Through it he could hear ominous hissings and rumblings.

He half rose from the bunk—sank back relieved. Fool that he was! That had been only the noise of the ash-hoist.

He set his teeth grimly. He would go through. He had defied Aunt Martha, albeit he had waited until she was in the grave.

He had defied J. Augustus Smythe and the People's National. Was he going to quit now? Quit for fear of a bullying officer and a foolish dread of the unknown and unexpected?

Not much! He was going to beat down and obliterate that miserable, cowardly specimen who had resulted from Aunt Martha's anxious but misguided love and guardianship. He was going to make a new man take form and substance, a man who would compel Macnamara to respect him.

So, eventually he dropped into a sleep that was troubled by contorted faces, by sudden roarings and upheavals, by swashings, as of water flowing from a riven boiler.

He awoke to an impression that somebody was rolling him violently in a barrel A wan, gray light showed through an unfamiliar, circular opening in the wall.

His head ached, every bone in his body ached. Then he remembered

Simultaneously he discovered that it was no human agency but the erratic gyrations of the vessel itself that were so discommoding him. Outside the Hook the Escort had run into a nasty lump of beam sea.

Straining at the dead weight dragging on her towing-hawser, the six knots headway she could make kept her rolling, pitching, and skidding as does nothing else on the face of the waters save only the destroyer.

The air was close and foul in the little room. A breath of pure, salt wind might clear his headache away. Claude poked his face over the edge of the berth.

Instantly he began to feel very queer. Poignant memories of the supper he had eaten last night came back to him. Something had disagreed with him.

He dropped out of the bunk, swayed staggeringly on his feet, clutching at the door-knob. Undoubtedly, that supper had given him ptomain poisoning. Green-faced and desperate, he opened the door.

A swash of cold water drenched him, salt and provocative. Heedless of the seas that

whipped him, he cast himself against the low bulwarks on his knees, his body stretched far over the rail.

Several years later he dragged himself back to the bunk and closed his eyes.

Some mocking voice spoke of fried fat pork for breakfast. Claude asked it to go go away. Immediately afterward he found himself once more in an attitude of prayer against the bulwarks.

Death must be very near. Somehow he got back to the bunk before it overtook him.

"Eight bells shall go in five minutes, buddy. Better you get up and drink some coffee," a kindly voice advised.

Slowly Claude's eyes opened. Yes, he had seen that face before, asleep in the bunk below his own.

"I– I—c-ugh-an't get up. I d-d-d-ugh-n't want any coffee!" he gagged.

"You have to get up and go on watch," the other oiler told him. "The coffee will maybe make you feel better."

He put a hand on Claude's shoulder.

"Come on, buddy—before the chief gets mad."

"Da-damn the chief!" C. Claude Clifford enunciated with feeble malevolence, quite unmindful that the door had opened and that the chief stood over him.

"Damn the chief, eh—get out of that you—you—you—feather-trimmed young lady. Quit beauty-sleepin' between them sheets!" the chief vociferated.

He seized Claude by the collar and hauled him out of the bunk.

"Get below and get quick!"

He emphasized the command by a rough shove that sent his victim staggering through the open door. Macnamara followed.

"Soger on me, will you?" he bellowed. "Ain't even feathers left to stuff you now!"

With other and more indelicate epithets, he pushed the sufferer before him down the ladder to the engine-room floor.

Might as well die here among the hungry machinery that seemed to reach for him on every side as up there in that bunk that was more like a coffin. The agony would be over the sooner. Blindly, Claude fumbled about his duty, closely followed by the chief, profanely exhorting him to cease malingering.

In time he found himself on the intermediate grating, trying to squirt oil into a link cup that bobbed and rocked, mocking his every effort to reach it with the spout. From the floor plates the chief roared abuse for the wasted oil that trickled down.

"Here, buddy, I do that while you quick drink this," said the same kindly voice beside him

A hand took the oil can, another hand thrust into his own a tin cup filled with steaming brown liquid.

The coffee tasted good. Its warmth put new life into Claude.

Actually, he felt better. With a mumbled word of heartfelt gratitude, he returned the cup to the Samaritan

"Hey, Feathers, are you goin' to fool around that gratin' the whole watch?" the chief inquired from below.

"Tell him to go plum' to hell. He's bad only with somebody he thinks maybe he can lick easy," the kindly little oiler advised, returning Claude the oil can.

Then he slipped up the ladder and out of sight. Still weak and shaky, but feeling immeasurably better, Claude returned to the floor plates.

"Get down the alley and see is the shaft stuffin' box leakin'," Mr. Macnamara commanded. He added a comprehensive summing up of all the shortcomings he had thus far noted in his new slave.

That coffee had worked wonders. With the glow of new life there came to Claude a fiery indignation. Who was this rough, brutal slave-driver to speak thus to him?

He had thought Macnamara a real bucko —and now he knew him for a common bully, bad only when he thought he had an easy victim. Claude drew himself up and faced the chief, trembling partly with the weakness of his recent seasickness, but more with the excitement of a great moment.

'Don't you talk to me that way," he barked in a voice that he tried to make bass and commanding, but that broke to shrill treble.

Macnamara whirled around, blank surprise on his face.

"What's that stuff?" he inquired.

"Don't you talk to me like that," Claude repeated, more firmly. "I'm trying to learn the work. Give me a chance"

"I'll give you a chance to wish you was dead, you—you—gold brick!" Mr. Macnamara promised, moving a step nearer.

His knees were shaking to the point of collapse, but Claude struck at that hateful, mocking face he had already learned to despise. He tried to strike as he had seen Macnamara hit the Maltese.

But his punch was feeble and amateurish, utterly lacking the needful steam. The next instant he decided that he must be tangled up with the high-pressure connecting rod.

He had no chance, and it was only the mercy of Providence that saved him from being knocked into the crank pit, to be brained by the whirling rod ends. Nevertheless he fought until he was downed and lay with heaving chest, dabbing at his damaged face with his sleeve.

Furthermore, he got to his feet and finished out the watch. Macnamara's language was more outrageous than ever. Claude bore it in tight-lipped silence.

A red spot burned in either cheek, visible through the blood smears, the outward sign of the consuming fire of hate and vengeance that burned in his heart.

At noon he ate ravenously. The weather was yet so heavy that the racks were on the table, but C. Claude Clifford had found his sea legs. After dinner the little oiler who had brought him the coffee drew him aside and exhibited a piece of raw beef.

"I get it by the cook for that eye," he explained as he commenced a deft ministration. "You done gude to stand up by Macnamara. You got sand

"But sand is not enough. You must know how you should handle your fist."

"Do you know how?" Claude inquired, eagerly.

"A liddle," Nels Pedersen admitted, modestly. "I ban on in perliminaries already."

"I'll give you five dollars a lesson to show me how to fight," Claude proposed

"You give me nodding," Mr. Pedersen declared. "For fun I learn you how you make Macnamara yump in der drink when he ban see you comin'."

Out on the after deck grating, in the confined space between the coiled hawsers, Claude took his first lesson. In his eagerness, he was heedless of the Escort's lurches that threatened to flip him overboard.

He faced Nels Pedersen, armed with a pair of six-ounce gloves. Lightly as the little Swede hit him, it was impossible for Claude entirely to conquer his tendency to flinch. But he did lessen it and toward the end requested Nels to hit him harder.

He wanted to become used to punishment. Through enduring pain he would learn to inflict the greater damage upon his enemy

Perched on bitts and deckhouse roof, the cook and all the idlers, even the skipper himself, looked on and shouted approval and encouragement. To their minds he was plainly a nut, but his delusion promised greatly to lighten the monotony of the slow, heavy drag.

Twice daily throughout that eastward trip, while the Escort was berthed at Portland and on the homeward road, the entertainment was staged. With every session Claude improved a little.

He conquered the flinching, and popular opinion was to the effect that he had the makings of a scrapper. The constant exercise, sea air, and huge quantities of hearty food worked miracles with his slight frame day by day.

Chief Engineer Macnamara made no comment upon his oiler's activities until the Escort had tied up once more at Port Sagamore, although it had become an open secret what Claude intended to do to him. Then he sought his subordinate.

"I guess you'll be quittin' us here," he insinuated.

"Not much. I'm going to stick until I've licked you. I'm going to smear the feathers from your insides all over the boat," Claude assured him.

"So you say," Mr. Macnamara sneered. Nevertheless, he looked disconcerted. There was a relentless method in Claude's procedure that looked ominous.

Moreover, the betting was already in his favor. All he needed was time and practise.

Macnamara knew that the skipper would interfere if he attempted to fire Claude and deprive the crew of the innocent joy of seeing their chief beaten up, as he had beaten others. Claude stayed.

For two months the lessons went on daily. Then Nels Pedersen declared that he could teach Claude no more. The only effect of any punishment that Nels could inflict was to make the recipient call for more.

Thereupon, a match was arranged between Claude and the cook, who rather fancied himself.

The cook lasted four rounds. Claude was delirious with joy. He had won a fight.

Thereafter the mania for battle took possession of him. He talked nothing else in his waking hours and dreamed scrap all night; to the disturbance of the other occupants of the oiler's berth who found it diplomatically wiser not to awaken him. His sickening, secret apprehension of disaster was completely submerged by this new passion, and the ghastly face on the stretcher troubled his dreams no more.

During the following trip Claude took on two deckhands and downed them both. Mr. Macnamara was treating him with noticeable civility these days. He was plainly willing to bury the hatchet.

Claude met his advances with an inscrutable reserve. The suspense told on the chief's appetite and made him haggard about the eyes.

Then the skipper, a democratic soul, awoke one fine morning, somewhere off Montauk and announced to the mate his determination to try six rounds with Claude.

"I used to be pretty good myself," he mused, reminiscently. "And this guy'll think he owns the whole boat pretty soon."

It was a wonderful day, crisp and bracing, the Escort hardly nodding to the sea. At the expiration of twenty-six minutes, the cook, acting as referee, rendered his professional opinion that the mill was a draw.

"Thanks, my man," said the skipper, patting Claude upon the shoulder. "A little exercise does me good now and then," he continued, feeling that a certain condescension was needed after his lapse from dignity.

"I may take you on again some time."

"If you do, you'll get licked, sir," Claude promised.

"In that case, I don't think I will," Captain Maxwell decided, tenderly rubbing an ear. "That would be bad for discipline."

Under the coal trestle at Port Sagamore, four months after their first encounter, Claude amply revenged the wrongs of all who had ever suffered at Mr. Macnamara's hands. The match was staged with all due ceremony, the skipper and cook officiating at the ringside, but it was so one-sided as to be a disappointment.

Thereafter, C. Claude Clifford, formerly of the People's National and late wearer of a red comforter on bad days, became the wearer of the championship belt in the Shore Line fleet. The best from the other tugs, the barges, and the piers fell before him.

He was a celebrity in every port in which the road ships coal. Admiring friends urged him to adopt a professional career. He could, they declared, make the middleweight title-holder look like a pork-and-beaner.

All this adulation was as honey in Claude's mouth. He had become a he-man at last. He wished Aunt Martha could see him now, yet it is not probable that the good lady would have shared her nephew's pride in his notoriety.

Then one day, in an eastern port, the Escort put a line aboard a barge that flew a red flag at her foremast head. Captain Maxwell approached her as though she had been an egg-shell and there was an elaborate spreading of heavy fenders along the tug's side.

The word was passed that she was loaded with high explosive, TNT.

With his heart in his throat, Claude watched the tug slip alongside. On the steel plating of the barge's hull his imagination painted faces distorted with agony, a pathetic procession of shrouded figures borne on stretchers.

What had a Shore Line towboat in the coal trade to do with that stuff?

He did not draw an approximately easy

breath until two hundred fathoms separated the Escort and her dangerous charge. Then he moved aft, fascinated, and as they went to sea watched the barge, marveling that men could be found with nerve enough to sail with such a cargo.

He ate his supper with poor appetite, his mind on the alert for the explosion that would hurl them all to eternity. His sleep was broken, filled with the old, terrible dreams.

Mingled with his dread was the bitter humiliation of knowing himself for a false alarm and the fear that the others would discover his state of mind

Fine sort of he-man, fine sort of champion! He could scrap, yes—protected by rules that at the worst would cause him to suffer a bloody nose—a black eye—a disfigured face.

But that stuff back there knew no rules. There was a danger such as only a real man could face calmly. And he was no real man

He wanted to run away, but there was no place to run to. If that barge blew up, nothing could save the tug, separated from her by little more than twelve hundred feet of water.

The barge did not blow up. They made port as uneventfully as usual. As the Escort entered the narrow waters of Port Sagamore Sound, crowded with shipping, Captain Maxwell shortened the tow line until the barge was a bare hundred feet astern of her.

A little later, with the whistle bellowing to warn the dockhands, he stopped his engines, then dropped alongside the barge, very cautiously, and made fast to wind her into her berth.

The close proximity of the explosive affected all hands. Mr. Macnamara, at the Escort's throttle, handled his engines with care in response to the orders from the pilot house.

Captain Maxwell, working tug and tow into the slip, made every move with deliberation—too much deliberation for the rushing cross currents about Port Sagamore pier heads.

Claude found an excuse to go on deck. It was hot below and a warm day above, but the sweat that drenched him was icy chill of nervous apprehension.

Would Captain Maxwell never get them away from that cursed barge? He had her headed into the slip and was inching her ahead by a few turns of the propeller at a time

Claude looked longingly at the pier. He wanted to jump ashore and walk away to a safe distance until the barge was finally disposed of, safely tied up.

Across the slip a camouflaged tramp steamer was loading gasoline from a lighter. Claude looked from her to the town on the hill.

What fools people were to live in that town, with explosives and inflammables being handled day and night right under their noses! Suppose that barge should blow up.

Captain Maxwell gave the barge another kick ahead. A treacherous lurking tide rip caught her bow and whirled it violently across the slip. There came a dull crash as her steel stem bit into the gasoline lighter's side.

Perhaps it was live coals from the lighter hoister's firebox; perhaps a spark struck from the steamer's side by the collision that ignited a bilged gasoline drum.

Flame sheeted upward, a second drum exploded with a loud "pop"; more flame—then a succession of pops like giant crackers as the fierce heat expanded and exploded more drums

A confused shouting dominated the roar of the fire.

On the Escort's deck, Claude stared wide-eyed and paralyzed. He saw the flames lick and devour the paint on the tramp's side. He saw men running, dragging a useless fire hose.

He saw the fiery column billow in a puff of wind and enwrap the bow of the barge, jammed in the lighter's crushed side. In the Escort's engine-room, the gong rang twice—an imperative "astern!"

Something snapped in his head. He leaped to the rail.

Standing poised, he raised his voice in a shriek:

*"Run for your lives—she's going to blow up!"*

The gong clanged again. The panic quality in that warning brought Engineer Macnamara and the firemen on deck while yet the vibrations were humming in the metal. Claude, swaying forward for a dive, pointed dumbly.

He saw their faces blanch. Then he splashed overboard and struck out in blind haste for midstream—anywhere, so that it was away from that barge.

Dimly, he heard the clamor of the back-up signal again repeated; heard, too, splash after splash as the tug's crew, the men from barge and lighter, infected by his panic, hastily followed him into the water.

As he wallowed and floundered, he realized the futility of trying to escape—and laughed hysterically. All along he had wanted to run. Now he was running—and what was the use?

It was funny. Nothing could save him, nothing save those people in the town above the sound.

And they were all doomed together—the cross currents baffled his every effort to make headway. He was still alongside the Escort's black hull.

"Macnamara, you white-livered skunk, come back and haul her clear! *Come back!*"

White-livered skunk was right. That was him, the champion of the fleet. He had known he would run.

Well, he was running all right—in this laughably futile effort to save his skin. Why couldn't he have the guts to meet death bravely—like Captain Maxwell, leaning from the pilot house window and bawling for some *man* to come back and run the engines?

And now, why on earth was he clawing for hold on a fender—hauling himself up to the rubbing streak around the tug's hull? What was the use? They could never back her clear.

Maybe not—but he could try. The explosion hadn't come yet. He was still alive and he knew how.

He watched Macnamara handle those engines a thousand times. Better to stay with Skipper Maxwell than to die with that yellow bunch in the water.

"Good man, Clifford—back her like hell!" then came to him from the pilot house.

There was plenty of steam. The engines jumped to the impulse of the open throttle.

The tug heeled as the strain came on her bitts through the stretched bow and breast lines.

No use—the barge was hopelessly jammed in the lighter's side. They'd never get her clear. She was absolutely certain to go up.

But now they were moving. Through an engine-room porthole he could see the red hot tramp sliding astern. He gave the engines full steam.

Then a great rushing, roaring sound dominated all else.

No use—

Out in mid stream, with his blistered volcano intact, Captain Maxwell got no response to his order to stop. When he raced below to shut off the engines himself he found Oiler Clifford in a dead faint on the floor plates.

The other day the Shore Line's marine superintendent showed me a letter from a mutual friend on the U. S. S. ——, somewhere in the North Sea. It detailed the exploit of a certain Ensign C. C. Clifford, U. S. N. R. Engineer Force, who has recently been awarded the V. C. by the British government and the D. S. C. by that of the United States.

Ensign Clifford is engineer officer on Mine Sweeper No. ——, formerly the Shore Line tug Escort.

It appears that they were clearing the way for a loaded hospital ship at the entrance to a British naval base.

A floating mine fouled the rudder of the hospital ship, but, by some miracle, the contact did not explode it, although it was a German mine, fully ready for its favorite business.

Ensign Clifford, who is noted throughout the fleet for his reckless daring, instantly dove overboard, cleared the mine and succeeded in chivvying it to a safe distance from the hospital ship, where it was exploded by rifle fire, without damage to any one.

# ERIC OF THE STRONG HEART.

BY VICTOR ROUSSEAU.

A FIVE-PART STORY—PART FIVE.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TEMPLE OF ODIN.

P leaped old Theobald, his fingers working in his rosary

"It is false!" he screamed, turning his haggard eyes upon Editha, who had not stirred during Wolf's speech. "Never has the Lady Editha profaned herself at Loki's temple."

"If it be true, O Theobald, dost thou accept the law which we made but now?" demanded Ralph.

"Aye!" cried the old king. "Aye; but let the proof be shown."

"What dost thou say, O Lady Editha?" asked Ralph.

"This traitor's words are true," she answered. "Daily, O king, I kneel in Loki's temple, where no woman may enter, save those who have dedicated their lives to the fire-god's service.

"And it is true that I have sold my soul unto Loki, unless before I died Rangarok fall and the day of Odin ends. But why I have done this I will not say."

"And thou knowest, O Lady Editha, the punishment, according to the law that I have made?" asked Ralph, smiling

"I know it."

Ralph motioned to the lord abbot. He did not mean to spare his victims, and I saw that it was his purpose to carry out the sentence with the maximum of moral suffering. And there went up a sobbing all through the hall as the old monk turned and looked at her, and Theobald, too, their faces working with grief and horror.

At that moment a memory of my readings came to me, and with it the resolve to try a desperate stroke.

"Hear me, O king!" I cried. "There is none who may not claim audience of you, according to your own words."

"Truly, why shouldst thou not speak, Eric the Stranger," he answered, "seeing that thou wilt soon be silent for so long?"

"Then I appeal to Danish law!" I cried. "Whenever a man or woman shall be accused of sorcery, let him have the right to undergo the ordeal by fire before the penalty of fire. Thus runs the law of Harthaknut, chief of the West Norsemen."

Ralph seemed staggered.

"There exists no such a law in Rangarok!" he cried.

"There is no such law," said Asgeld.

"But there has been that law among the Danes."

"Ages ago, as our wise men tell us, such a law existed. But never within the memory of the oldest has it been enforced."

"And never within the memory of the oldest has there been burning for witchcraft in Loki's fire!" I cried, hazarding a tremendous guess. "When the cause comes into being, then is the law applied."

And the whole assembly took up my words.

"Let the law be applied!" they shouted. "The ordeal before the burning!"

Old Asgeld hesitated, looked at Ralph, and then smiled very evilly.

"Since the people will have it so, O king," he said, "let the lord abbot make the test and put the Lady Editha to the ordeal of the red-hot stones. And if she cross them unburned, then she is no witch and guiltless of sin.

"But if her foot be even scorched, let her suffer with Bjorn the Ox, and Eric the Stranger this day in Loki's fire."

"It is well answered," said Ralph, rising.

"Let the captives be guarded upon the steps of the temple. And when we have dined, let these matters be put to proof."

The guards, at his nod, began to drive the people out of the hall. Behind them went Editha's maidens, sobbing, after them old Theobald with bent head and trembling fingers that played and strayed among his beads, and the lord abbot and the monks. Then, closely guarded, Bjorn and I followed, with the swordsmen clearing a passage.

Outside the flood of sunlight almost blinded me. But presently I began to see that Ralph's plot had been deftly staged.

For there were armed men everywhere, and hardly a single one of the populace to be seen. And all about the temple of Loki were gathered swordsmen in mail.

It looked as if the whole of Rangarok had gone over to the madman. And I knew that our chances, Editha's chances, were infinitesimal.

But what of Harald? What had Ralph done with him?

It was clear that his fate, too, had been prearranged. And he seemed not to have been included in our own sentence.

Then I saw our guards muttering and pointing upward above Loki's temple, where the sun blazed in the sky. At first I could distinguish nothing.

Then slowly some dark object came into view above the temple dome. It resolved itself into the figure of a man, hanging in chains from the Gothic pinnacle which was the topmost point in Rangarok.

And then I understood the meaning of Ralph's last words to the captive king, and the insane cruelty that had inspired them.

And, as I looked, I saw from the shaking of the chains that Harald lived. So he would live, hanging between earth and heaven, and staring into the sun, and beaten by the winds and rains for many a day, while Ralph reigned under him.

As I halted, the guards hustled me roughly onward. I looked at Bjorn in horror, but his face remained as impassive as ever. We approached the steps leading up to Loki's temple.

I expected that we would be taken inside, but Ralph had evidently made other plans. Bjorn was taken away, and I was led round the base of the rock to a doorway that I had not seen before, leading into a vault beneath the building. My captors thrust me within and locked the door upon me.

At first it seemed pitch-dark inside. I groped my way around the walls, and discovered that the cavern was much smaller than the temple above it; I tried to cross, proceeding cautiously for fear of some chasm within.

But instead of a chasm I encountered a circular shaft of stone, and after a while I was just able to make out the circular well that I had seen in the temple.

Evidently it ran down through the rock to the cavern, and deeper, into the depths of the earth. I walked around it till a sudden lambent gleam of fire attracted my attention.

Then I saw that all round the shaft, at about the height of my eyes, there was a slit in the stone, through which I could look down on Loki's fire beneath.

I saw the pale flame, whose green-blue glow denoted the presence of many gases. I looked upward, wondering how the sacrifice was to be made in the temple, since the wicker-basket was larger than the well-top, as I think I mentioned before.

And then I saw something else that set me wondering. For the crack in the temple floor, of which I have also spoken, extended straight down through the masses of rock about the base of the well. But, whereas, in the temple it was no more than a fissure whose edges approximated, here it widened until there was a gap of two feet between edge and edge.

Hard as granite and black as ebony above, it became grayish underneath, until it seemed to take on the glow of the subterranean fires. And suddenly I perceived that it was not hard below, but fluid, and the whole mass seemed to be bubbling and boiling upward.

The peak of Rangarok was a mere crust above a living volcano.

Even the ground on which I stood evinced unmistakable tremors. I wondered whether this was a constant condition or whether some earthquake portended.

I did not remember having felt this trembling within the temple, which, being built on the outcropping of the rock, would hardly yield to that motion of the fluid mass.

The extraordinary formation of the rocks, the nearness of the fluid rocks below, interested me in spite of my situation. I looked down at Loki's fire again.

To my astonishment it seemed much higher in the well than formerly. And, even as I watched it, I saw it climbing. For there was a great stain on the interior of the well, and I saw the little wavelets of fire leap about this and submerge it and ascend and cover it, while the movement under me became more perceptible.

Then, all at once, I understood, and my heart sank. For I had fashioned one of those dreams of freedom that come to desperate men in the anticipation of some convulsion of nature which would set us free.

That hope was blasted. For the fire beneath me was a flaming geyser, lava of almost incandescent heat, one of those formations that bubble up periodically at intervals of days, weeks, months, or years. The sacrifice had been appointed for that day because it was the day on which the geyser would make its periodical eruption.

So it would not be necessary to lower the basket into Loki's well, too small to admit it. The fire would leap up above the altar and engulf it and its living occupants.

And with the eruption through this safety valve, the tremors would cease, the quake subside, and Rangarok remain safe against Loki's fury.

As I looked upward into the shaft I saw something else that made me wonder.

As I have said, the temple rock was the apex or cone of the volcano, whose base was the entire citadel. Now I could see, not the hilt, but the point of Odin's sword, thrust aslant clear into the point of the cone in such a manner that its blade seemed to strike the exact center of the great fissure.

The cleft was, at the cone, no more than a minute crack, and the sword gave the appearance of not cleaving, but in some way supporting it, as the keystone of an arch.

At that moment a slight sound near me caused me to start. I was almost afraid in the loneliness of the place.

I looked about me. To my horror I saw a hooded figure coming through the broadest part of the fissure. There emerged the figure of an old, bent woman.

The hood was thrown back. I looked into the face of Haggudra, with the young girl's eyes, and the furrows of immeasurable age upon her face.

I confess that I shook with fear. The presence of the abominable old witch was nauseating as a loathsome nightmare. Had Haggudra come to gloat over the sacrifice?

She stood before me, her clawlike hands seeking mine, and the bony framework of her face outstretched toward mine.

"It cannot be!" she muttered. "She cannot escape me now. Listen, Eric the Stranger! By my arts I evaded death; yea, and by long seeking I learned the secret whereby, once a young girl was delivered unto me, I should be able to possess her body at death and sway men as once I swayed Aethelraed, the false Saxon.

"For this cause I gave my soul to Loki, trusting to live on and on eternally in all the beauty that once was mine. I hunger for life, I hunger for the love of men; I, whom all men abhor and fly from. Surely the stones cannot burn her, when I have armed her with the magic of the Trolls!"

I did not catch the meaning of her words at first, nor the drift of her thoughts; but suddenly the wildest hope flashed into my brain. I had read of South Sea Islanders, dervishes, men of all nations, who had gone unscathed through this same ordeal, as if by a miracle—actually because, when hypnotized, their skin acquired insensibility to the momentary heat of fire.

I had even heard it suggested that those who escaped the seemingly impossible ordeal in the Middle Ages had been previously subjected to hypnotism as a preparation. And I was convinced that Editha still remained in the power of Haggudra.

The old crone clawed at me.

"Did you not hear the oath she swore in the Trolls's mountain?" she whimpered. "By Loki and by Hel she swore to follow Loki's worship till death, or until Rangarok should fall and Odin perish from the land.

"And in return I gave her life with you, and after death her soul is as the Trolls, which die, and her body shall be mine, that I may become young and fair once more. Fly, then, and save yourself, for she can come to no harm!"

I saw the old devil's motive clearly now. She was afraid that I was the stranger destined to pull down Rangarok, and that with its fall she would lose Editha forever.

She saw my refusal before I uttered it, and uttered a piercing whistle.

Instantly, in answer to the signal, the Trolls began to swarm up out of the crevice and all about me, like a swarm of rats. They laid their little hands upon me, pulling at me, to force me down.

And now I saw something more: I understood the meaning of Egbert's words when he said that even if one remained in Rangarok one would come to the Trolls's city.

I remember that the Trolls, as underground inhabitants, were the hereditary servitors in Loki's temple. No doubt the passage beneath the rocks ran straight back to their city.

As they pulled at me, turning their wise little faces up toward mine, I saw Haggudra's eyes fixed steadily on mine. And again I felt the numbing power of the old woman's spell.

My head whirled. The eyes seemed to become the eyes of Editha. I felt my resistance going from me.

I put forth all my strength of will, until the force of that silent battle of brains weakened me like a wrestling-match.

Slowly the Trolls were dragging me to the edge of the crevice. I looked down, to see a narrow tunnel below me lit by Loki's fire, now high in the well

And ever Haggudra's eyes burned on mine, and in them I seemed to see all that I had ever dreamed of, all the broken hopes of life. The visions drove away reality.

I was a boy again at my mother's knee. I was at college, and Ralph Wiston was my friend. I was meeting Editha, riding with her—

My foot slipped on the brink, and with a last effort I threw off the hypnotic bonds.

In that instant's tension I fought Haggudra with all the strength of desperation. Suddenly the door of the cave clicked open and two guards appeared. Instantly, like shadows of the night, the Trolls were gone, Haggudra, too, and I was standing, with reeling brain and swimming senses, in a flood of sunshine.

They led me out to the temple steps, and I saw that the whole ground was one mass of people, who, uttering no sound, awaited the outcome of the ordeal.

Then we were within the temple, and now I was able to understand my surroundings and to take cognizance of them.

There was the same packed mob of Danes and Angles, the swordsmen, the priests in their black and red robes, with Asgeld at their head, smiling triumphantly. Opposite him, with head cast down, stood the lord abbot, and by him Theobald, stringing his beads and murmuring his prayers.

Not daring at first to look toward the altar, I let my eyes stray upward. I saw the upraised hands of the two guardian gods supporting the bronze pillar, with the great wickerwork basket above it. I saw the umbrella knob, by pressure on which the basket would be brought down upon the altar lid.

But the temple roof, which I had thought solidly made, was partly open to the sky, and, looking toward it, I now perceived that the pillar, which seemed to be extensible, ran up to the Gothic pinnacle, and that the figure in chains was attached to this and not to the tapering stone.

I saw the body of Harald, writhing above, and I saw that the same pressure which would bring down the basket would lower the extension until Harald was within the temple, to be the butt of the spectators.

My heart burned at the hellish cruelty of this contrivance. And, gathering courage, I looked down.

The stone lid of the well was in its place, so that the fire could not be seen; and yet I heard it hissing and roaring underneath. And the lid was a glowing red, as asbestos turns in a gas-stove.

And, standing barefooted on a platform beside it, I saw Editha awaiting the torture.

I leaped toward her, but the hands of the

guards caught and held me, and hoarse shouts of mirth rang out. I saw the smile on the face of Ralph standing beside Asgeld.

Then a man dealt me a buffet across the face, and as I reeled back I recognized the dastard, Wolf, who had betrayed us.

There was another roar of laughter. There was no mercy in the hearts of Loki's worshippers.

Then I saw something that gave me a gleam of comfort. It was Bjorn, guarded by four swordsmen, and as I looked at him his lips formed a barely perceptible negation. And I saw somebody else—Haggudra, her bent body craned forward behind Ralph.

"Never mind the woman!" she shrieked. "Burn them! Burn them in Loki's fire before they do you harm!

"In my visions I have seen them coming, and though the end was not clear, ye know, O men of Rangarok, that one day your city shall fall -aye, the lordly city in which is your pride.

"Burn them first, O Ralph, king of great Rangarok!"

The old devil was determined that since I would not flee I should be burned and Rangarok saved from destruction

But the guards pushed her back, and Ralph addressed Editha.

"O lady princess," he said, "think before you undergo this test. For most surely I love you, and would make you my queen. And I, who have made this law, can also unmake it."

"Not so, O king!" screamed Asgeld furiously "The laws cannot be changed!"

Ralph understood the gesture, if not the words. He hesitated, and then, as if seeking support, turned to old Theobald.

"What say you, fellow ruler?" he asked. "Cannot a law be changed, if it is the king's pleasure?"

And now occurred the most amazing psychological episode of which I have any knowledge. For old Theobald stepped forward, his face working with emotion, and faced Ralph in the attitude of a lawgiver.

"It is not true, O fellow king, that our laws cannot be changed," he said. "Were it otherwise, a bad law would endure forever.

"Nevertheless, among the principles of law which have come down to us from the ancients, there is this: no law may be retroacting in effect, since otherwise laws would lose their legality and become the agencies of rulers' whims and favoritism. Therefore, O Ralph, this new law, which is a bad law, must be repealed instantly."

A shout of joy from among Theobald's followers; scowls from Ralph's and Asgeld.

"But, in the repealing, it must be provided," continued Theobald, "that the repeal be not retroactive. Therefore, my daughter, the Lady Editha, must undergo the ordeal under the old law, and, should she fail, suffer the penalty laid down by it."

And he collapsed back into the lord abbot's arms.

It was the Anglo-Saxon worship of law, carried to the *n*th power. I knew what his proclamation cost him. And I knew that in his simple, stubborn mind, sooner should Editha die than the law be broken.

"I will not be your queen," said Editha calmly. "Therefore let the ordeal proceed, since I am ready."

At that the mob went mad. Ralph, livid with fury, nodded, and two of Asgeld's priests, who were shod with bronze boots, ascended the platform, one on each side of Editha.

They took her by the hands. I saw Haggudra's eyes fixed on the girl's face. Slowly, as if compelled by some unseen power, Editha lifted her head and looked back at the crone.

Next moment the priests and she were walking across the red-hot surface of the stone lid of the well. And Editha moved as if unconscious of the flames beneath, and so, gliding lightly between them, reached the opposite side and descended.

And her feet were neither scorched nor blistered, though little rivulets of solder were running down the priests' boots, and they began limping and wincing and kicking them off their sandaled feet

And even the soles of their sandals were scorched and smoking.

There was a hush of terror through the assembly. All had seen the miracle.

Then, breaking through the guards, Haggudra ran forward again.

"Sacrifice them, my lord Ralph!" she she shrieked. "Do you not see that Odin is wroth with his people and that he has suffered the God of the Christians to prevail over him?

"Sacrifice them, lest Rangarok fall. I have seen I have seen in my dreams, and now I know. These are they who are destined to pull Odin from his place unless they die!"

"Let them die now!" roared Ralph, and motioned to one of the priests about Asgeld.

The man ran lightly up the steps of the altar, leaped upon the hands of the two guardian gods, and pressed the knob of the wicker-basket, which descended slowly by pulleys until it was a foot above the red-hot surface of the lid.

At the same time, by some mechanical process which I did not see, the lid was thrown back. A wave of heated air suffused the space about the well.

And I saw Loki's fire leaping and dancing upon the edge of the altar.

Simultaneously with a creaking sound, the living body of Harald descended through the roof of the temple.

The sound of the clanking chains attracted every one's attention. I stood up.

We saw Harald, bound face downward, looking upon the mob of those who had once obeyed him.

The chains, which had run askew, wrapped him like a mummy, and must have bitten deep into his flesh, but no sound came from his lips in all his agony.

The passion of the Danes burst all its bounds, and I think the very sense of their treachery spurred them on.

"To Loki's fire!" they screamed. "Burn them! Sacrifice them!"

"Aye, if it be not too late," whimpered Haggudra, who had suddenly grown calm. And she watched first myself and then Bjorn, with intense terror upon her face.

Editha, who had left the altar upon the side where Theobald stood, appeared like one in a trance; she watched the proceedings as if she did not know what was happening

At Ralph's nod two of the guards seized me, and, tipping the basket, hurled me over the edge into the bottom of it.

They stood, holding it aside from the leaping flames, waiting to swing it back across the altar to their comrades, who were holding Bjorn.

What happened next occurred in a moment, I think, though then it seemed an eternity, and that long-drawn-out moment leaves, to this day, an exact and clear-cut picture in my mind of the unchanging faces and immovable postures of the participants, as if a cinematograph film had been arrested, and the shadow-pictures retained their instantaneous poise and gesture.

For Bjorn put out his hands and thrust the guards away. And moving one step forward he placed his two hands on the hilt of the two-handed sword within the rock.

I saw the muscles upon his body ripple as the surface of a pond under the wind. He stood like a Hercules, feet apart, back bent, feet braced against the base of the well. And then, with a single mighty heave, he pulled out Odin's sword and held the terrific weapon high in the air.

"Thy doom, O king! And the doom of Rangarok!" he said.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE FIRE-GOD.

HAGGUDRA'S piercing shriek rang through the temple. She leaped at me through the unresisting, stupefied guards and, catching the basket's edge, ran with it toward the altar, scrambling up the wicker-work like a monkey, intent on tilting it above the flames.

And as she clung there the sudden swing of the heavy hanging mass, released, carried her, still clinging to it, across the altar. The sudden momentum carried me across with it and tilted me to the temple floor at the feet of Bjorn, who still stood with sword upraised, as the long momentum drew to its conclusion.

But hardly had Bjorn drawn the sword when, with a whistling shriek, a spear of fire, twenty feet high, shot upward. It missed the basket, and I saw Haggudra striving frantically to drop to the ground.

But the basket's movement was irregular and instead of clearing the altar well upon

the other side, its direction changed into a circular movement, and it was swinging back toward the altar again.

Into the cauldron of fire Haggudra fell, and in the single scream she uttered I read more than the physical pain and terror of death. It was the shriek of a lost soul, and it rings in my ears to-day as I write of it.

The leaping flames sucked in the withered body, tossed it as if in mockery, one instant, on their lambent surface, and drew it down into the unfathomable depths from which they sprang.

And still Bjorn held the sword aloft and faced Ralph and his men.

Ralph had not stirred.

A quiver ran through the temple, the ground shook, and a second flame rose almost to the temple roof.

Then, with the sound of a thousand thunders, the temple walls were riven and the next moment we were all buried beneath the falling stones.

Whether the sword had really been driven home by some magician-architect of old, to form the keystone of the cone and hold in check the surging gases beneath, or whether it was the long-threatened eruption of the volcano, Rangarok was no more.

The cone was riven asunder, and a stream of fiery lava poured in a torrent over the fields.

My last act as I fell was to clutch at Editha. Then for a time I heard only the groans of the injured as they struggled beneath the débris, and was only vaguely conscious that some weight pinned me down.

But the walls of the temple had fallen outward. A few survived. Curiously—almost providentially—the one place that remained unbroken was that side of the altar where Theobald and his monks were standing.

I felt hands wrenching away the débris above me, and I was pulled to my feet, to find Bjorn standing over me, and near him Theobald and Editha.

We were upon a little platform of stone, a sort of island in the universal ruin. The temple was gone, and the lava river was flowing on into the heart of the citadel, eating up the grass beneath it as it raced toward the walls.

Under a huge pile of stones near me I saw the flattened form of Wolf, crushed instantly by the fall of the roof.

I drew Editha to me. And as we cowered there, trying to regain our wits, I saw one of the most amazing things of that dreadful day.

For there emerged from among the stones the bloody head and shoulders of a huge man, and then the body and the limbs. I saw that the arms and legs had been bound with chains, which had apparently been broken by the fall. Beneath the blood and the dust I recognized Harald.

Great weals of livid flesh stood out upon his bare arms, so that their shape was hardly human. A chain had bitten into his shoulder, leaving a welt as thick as a sword-belt.

He reached down among the stones and wrenched a broken sword from a dead man's hand. And, uttering a cry that seemed to fill the air with sound, he ran from the temple.

"Ralph!" I muttered to Bjorn.

As I spoke I looked into the ruins, but he took my head in his hands and turned my face toward the city. And I perceived a knot of swordsmen burst through the flying multitude that scattered like ants when their nest is overthrown, and make toward the walls.

After them ran Harald, more fleet than any runner I had ever seen, roaring and brandishing his broken sword.

Then the mob swallowed them, and I awoke to the full realization of our position.

The temple was growing hotter every moment, and the leaping flames threatened to engulf us as the wind caught them and blew them toward us.

On three sides of us was the flowing, molten river. There existed still a narrow passage by which we might hope to outrace it to the walls, but it was narrowing every instant that we waited.

Bjorn caught my arm and I took Editha's. The abbot led the trembling old king, and, followed by the band of monks, we ran for safety, just escaping as the streams coalesced behind us.

Hardly had we reached the level surface beneath when, with another roar, a cloud of dust and cinders was hurled up from the broken cone

"Where are we going?" I managed to gasp to Bjorn, as we ran side by side.

He pointed toward the walls, but did not answer me. And now we saw the fleeing populace again, crossing the bridges and making for the walls beneath.

We reached the upper entrance of the bridge. There was no guard there, and immediately beneath us I saw a long breach in the wall, and near it the charred and overturned hulks of Sweyn's three towers.

But at the foot of the breach was the long battle array of the besiegers, pressing onward in solid column, with shields upraised above their heads, so that they seemed to form a parapet against the rain of arrows that streamed on them.

I saw the Danish archers yield place to the swordsmen. But before the battle closed the mob came streaming through the defenders, forcing them aside by the sheer weight of their impact, breaking their lines and then those of the assailants.

Of necessity the battle paused. Nothing was visible but that fleeing stream, pouring like the lava river across the bridge and into lower Rangarok.

Then I saw a newer turmoil in its midst, and saw Harald emerge, towering above them all. And two men driven to bay turned and faced him, two swords to his one broken one.

One of the pair was Ralph. In the other I recognized old Asgeld, lithe as a boy in spite of his years.

The old priest snatched a shield from a dead man and ran at Harald, thrusting the shield into his face and thrusting upward with the weapon. And I saw Ralph circling behind the unarmed king, trying to strike his sword home without danger of death.

Harald retreated to the parapet, and his broken blade rang out above the din as it hammered on Asgeld's shield. Their thrusts were too quick for the eye to follow, and I did not know whether the blood that covered Harald's body came from the old wounds or from new ones.

Swift as lightning the great Dane parried the priest's blows, and even found time to turn a threatening sword-edge toward Ralph from time to time.

But from that quarter he had little to fear, for I could see that Ralph's only thought was of flight. But he feared to pass the sword of Harald, and he stood at bay, his great form and long arms covering the sloping ramp.

The last of the mob had streamed past them, and the soldiers, either through fear or because of divided sympathies, stood round and watched the duel passively, while even the besiegers lowered their shields and looked above them, waiting, too.

Asgeld recoiled a pace, and then, uttering a wild cry, loosed the shield from his arm with a sudden, adroit movement, and, hurling it in Harald's face, rushed at him with his sword uplifted.

But, swifter still, Harald stepped aside, and the shield went clanging down into the foss beneath. Then, with an upward movement of his broken weapon which the eye could not follow, he clove Asgeld's sword-hand from the arm as the blade descended.

The hand, still clenching the sword, continued on its downward flight and struck the parapet of the bridge. Aye, and so strong was the blow that the sword-point became embedded there, and stood upright, with the severed hand still clutching it.

Then, with a roar, Harald sprang forward and wrenched Ralph's sword from him. And, grasping the two men, one in either arm, he began to sway to and fro.

Slowly Asgeld's feet and Ralph's left the ground. Their writhing bodies were helpless as those of insects in Harald's clasp.

Ralph screamed as he divined the purpose of his enemy, but no cry came from old Asgeld's lips. Higher and higher still the mad king raised them, till he held them at the extremity of either arm.

Then, putting all his strength into the act, he swung them together round him and hurled them from the parapet.

The writhing, twisting bodies fell together, whirling in an arc like a Roman wheel and plunged in lifeless masses of broken, quivering flesh upon the rocks, five hundred feet beneath the bridge.

All this time, neither the defenders nor the besiegers had stirred. But at the sight of Harald's herculean feat, a roar of enthusiasm went up, and the men-at-arms of the garrison gathered about their king.

And still more fiercely the storming party swept up through the breach and upon the bridge

At first the turn of the spiral shielded them; then they came to the straight upward curve of the bridge, and here the two forces met. In front of the long column of shields I saw Sweyn's, with the two ships, and my heart leaped up in thankfulness that he lived.

I was about to run forward, heedless of my peril, I believe. I wanted to run between the contestants and bid them put their weapons away, since Dane and Angle might now live peacefully together, and there was nothing more to war for.

But as I did so, again there came the roar of an explosion. The slender bridge swung like a spider's web, twisted on its upper supports, and hung askew over the abyss, sending the combatants sprawling

Simultaneously I saw great gaps appear in the house-fronts, the roof of the palace fell with a mighty crash, and a great cloud of cinders half veiled the sun.

Suddenly the molten stream appeared between the buildings of the rocking colleges, and began to pour in a hissing, smoking torrent down into the depths below.

Happily it missed the bridge, on which the fighters, heedless of the catastrophe, continued their sanguinary battle. Now I saw Harald among his men, rallying them.

With an impetuous rush, the Danes bore back the Saxons to the bottom of the bridge, back to the very breach in the walls

It was a pitiful sight to see the struggling mass recoil, at the moment of victory, before the unconquered Harald, and yet my admiration of the man grew with each moment that I watched the two ships on Sweyn's shield sink back and back like the apex of a receding wave

How long would the senseless murder last?

They were fighting on the lowest section of the bridge, and another rush of the Angles bore back the Danes. All over the breach the combat was developing, as more and more men rushed up from either side to the crucial battle-place. And while they struggled to and fro, inchoate forms in the murky haze, Rangarok was slipping into ruin above them and they knew nothing of it!

Suddenly the end came. For, with a louder roar than any, the whole front of the stone masonry, into which the upper bridge was anchored, collapsed into the foss, carrying the bridge with it.

For just a moment the wonderful spirals seemed to uncoil as a rope that is thrown. And the swarming figures at the lower end were like flies on a hawser.

Then the whole bridge crashed into irretrievable ruin beneath, half filling the deep fosse, and tossing up stones and bodies by the impact of the shock, as a wave plays with the débris of the seashore.

Half the attacking force—all the Danes—had gone to instant death. No, not quite all, for, on the walls beneath me, above the breach, I saw Harald at bay, sword still in hand and shield on high, facing Sweyn's men alone.

Sweyn leaped forward, but not to battle. He lowered his shield, and, at the recognized signal for parley, Harald forbore to strike.

For a moment the two stood there together. Then I saw Sweyn withdraw to the foot of the breach, and knew that Harald had refused his offer.

A moment's pause, and then Sweyn was upon him, at the head of his men. I saw the great sword hew a circle about him as Harald fought his last fight for Rangarok. I saw Sweyn fall, and his men draw back, irresolute.

I saw the archers bend their bows, to accomplish what the swordsmen had tried to do and failed. And then the unexpected happened.

For, before the first dart had left its bended bow, Harald had torn off his armor, flung shield away, and, sword in hand, had leaped from the wall into the city below.

A leap of five and twenty feet it was, even there, where the high wall was broken. A leap into an armed camp, with dead lying thicker than autumn leaves, and the living

armed to do battle; and into a hostile city, its people hidden within their homes in fear, but buzzing at every window.

Harald alighted on his feet, as agilely as a cat might have done, and began a race across the open and down the long street of Rangarok at a speed swifter than I had believed possible in man.

No wonder that he was called the deer-footed!

The swordsmen, taken by surprise, struck at him and missed him, the archers' shafts, shot on the venture, passed him unharmed. Already he had gained the central street behind the besiegers' camp, and was running on, a lonely figure, toward the lower walls

Then, to my intense joy, I saw Sweyn emerge from among his men, mount the breach hastily, and fit an arrow, turning the point toward the fugitive, still not more than fifty paces away. Swifter than I could see the taut bowstring grew slack.

I saw a flicker of dust a foot in front of Harald's running feet.

The Danes groaned in dismay, but Sweyn was already fitting another arrow. Again the bow twanged, and I saw the dust fly from the ground at Harald's side.

Once more, and the last shot! The helmet of the fugitive fell from his head and toppled into the road. And, still unharmed, Harald continued on his course

Horsemen were galloping in pursuit of him, but he outdistanced them, leaving the fleetest steeds toiling hopelessly behind.

Presently I heard wild shouting about the gates of the lower city; and then, incredible as it seems even now, I saw Harald beyond them and running into open country, a tiny figure alone, with the horsemen toiling vainly after him

Then, as if a curtain had fallen upon that scene, I remembered Editha beside me. And, standing alone with her, among the ruined buildings upon the broken crest of Rangarok, I took her into my arms.

We were happy there, with all the old evil ended, and the dread bargain with the Troll witch ended with the fall of the Norsemen's gods. We forgot everything for a long time, until the sound of tumultuous cheering made me start and release her.

The Angles had swarmed into the citadel by the unbroken bridge, and had gathered round me, cheering in that solid Anglo-Saxon fashion that always sent a thrill to my heart. Yet I smiled at the tribute; it seemed so little after Editha.

Suddenly I perceived that they were not cheering me after all, but Bjorn, near me.

And, after the first wince of humiliation, I understood that this must needs be, and that it was better so. For Bjorn had pulled the sword from the rock and fulfilled the old prophecy; and I guessed, though he had never told me, that this was the vision which had driven him northward to Rangarok.

The lord abbot came forward and placed a gold circlet on his brow. But he doffed it and placed it on the head of old Theobald.

"Harken, ye folk of Rangarok!" he cried with a sudden passion that I had never seen in him before. "This day the old wrongs are ended, and Dane and Angle shall live as one folk in peace together. And all the thought that ye have heretofore given to war ye shall henceforward give to the arts of peace.

"Thus, when you have become strong, and have learned the wisdom of the other folk from the teachers whom I shall bring to you, the gates of the ice shall be opened, and you shall mingle with the other folk as your forefathers did, and learn that all men are brothers.

"But until Theobald's death, which may our God avert for many a year, he shall reign, and I shall rule under him."

Suddenly he swung about and faced a band of Asgeld's priests who were standing upon the outskirts of the crowd which had assembled

"But know ye," he cried with a look of stern resolve upon his face, "that from henceforward, as Odin is dead, so Odin's worship ceases. For the old gods are dead, and their last stronghold has fallen, and henceforth the true faith prevails—the faith of the Angle's god

"And he who will not follow this faith and swear to worship Odin no more, shall be placed aboard a ship and cast upon the waters beyond the ice—and there let Odin protect him!"

At this there was a buzzing among the crowd; and then, after a few moments of discussion, two by two, Loki's and Odin's priests came forward and, kneeling at the lord abbot's feet, accepted his faith forever.

Then Bjorn saw me and came to me, and would have spoken of me again to the crowd, but I restrained him. I marveled at the new majesty of the man, who seemed to wear his honors so naturally that he did not even think it necessary to explain to me how he had come to oust me

And how strange it was that, of we three, the third and least had risen to leadership! How all my plans had gone a glimmering! And yet I was unfeignedly glad.

"Eric," said Bjorn, "you shall teach the people"

I shook my head

"You forget, Bjorn," I said, "that I have both won something dearer to me than life, here in Rangarok, and also lost something that was once the dearest thing to me."

For already the memory of the Ralph Wiston whom I had known was creeping back, ousting the picture of the madman. I could hardly see Bjorn's face for the mist before my eyes.

"You plan to return to America?" Bjorn asked.

"With your leave," I answered.

"Eric," he said, clapping me on the shoulder, "you are the truest and strangest man that I have ever known. A wise man and a humble one, a brave man, and a shrinking one, a strong man who does not know his powers.

"I would give all but my crown for you to stay and lead my people. Nevertheless, where the heart is, there must one be. Go, then, if you must, Eric, my friend, and God be with you and the Lady Editha!"

Sweyn had come up and joined us, all bloody and stained, with a great dent in his helm, made by Harald's sword. He listened in silence to our conversation, which he readily understood.

"There is one thing more to be done before I go," I said to Bjorn

"Aye, and quickly," he answered, scowling. "There can be no peace in Rangarok while Harald lives, for he would ever gather new bands about him and lead them to plunder."

Now I became conscious of that old admiration for the old Danish king that made my heart go out in a sudden wave of pity for him.

"Let there be no more bloodshed, Bjorn," I said "The old order is gone forever. Let Harald live, and be ruler under you, over his own people."

"That cannot be," he answered. "Harald must die, that no more harm come to this land."

"I shall ask his life as a last boon, as my parting gift, Bjorn," I told him.

"The one boon that I cannot grant even to you, Eric," he answered.

The implacable nature of his resolve amazed me still more. What a nature had lain concealed beneath the placid, gentle surface of our old follower!

It was almost as if he had cast off a slough from his soul, and newly awakened. And yet, despondent as his words made me, I caught a sudden gleam of hope from the look upon Sweyn's face.

"Sweyn," I said, "Bjorn was with you upon the walls when you shot at Harald. Now you are the cunningest archer in all Rangarok, and yet you aimed three times and missed him. Was it ill fortune that unnerved your hand?"

"Nay, Eric," he answered, smiling sheepishly.

"You could have pierced him?"

"Verily, my friend," he answered, "never yet has Sweyn shot at a mark within an arrow's flight and missed by ill adventure. I could not bring my heart to kill the bravest, strongest, fleetest man in Rangarok."

"And Bjorn?" I asked, trembling with eagerness.

"He said, 'Well done,'" said Sweyn.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### RANGAROK SAILS TO MEET HAROLD.

NEWS of Harald's activities was not slow in reaching us. We learned within a brief period that he had withdrawn to his own stronghold in the outer isles, from

which he was already harrying the shores with his fleet of thirty ships and the band of two thousand men whom he had gathered about him.

And what decided Bjorn that an immediate attack on him was imperative, was the growth of a new legend about the ex-king. He was looked on as invincible, as the representative of the old gods whose worship he had sworn to restore. And he had secret followers even in Rangarok.

So the next month passed in preparations for war. We had a fleet of about as many ships as Harald, and these had to be fitted with new sails and overhauled; also provisions had to be secured, with all the equipment for that naval battle which it was evident must take place before we could attack Harald's stronghold.

By now it was almost the beginning of winter. The sun shone for only three or four hours daily, describing a low arc in the southern sky.

Many advised that our operations should be postponed till spring, but Bjorn and Sweyn were resolved to strike the last bow quickly.

In the end it was a body of three thousand men, trained to sea service, that marched out from Rangarok. Editha clung to me in tears; the parting, after we had endured so much, was almost unbearable.

"In two weeks we shall return," I told her, "and then, according to our plans, we shall set sail together for home."

For we, too, could not wait for spring

"Home!" she repeated. And, in my selfishness, I believe I had not thought till then that Rangarok was home to Editha.

"O Eric," she said, still holding me, "though we are not yet as man and wife, nor shall be until the day we sail, hast thou forgotten the old custom whereby the women followed their lords to battle?"

I laughed and kissed her again, and turned away with an aching heart that I tried in vain to hide.

But she still held me

"Eric," she said, "if thou shouldst not return, I should still bear with life if—if—"

"If what?" I asked, patting her arm.

"If we were married first," she answered shyly.

That was on the evening before our departure. And, although the wedding had been planned to be a public one, I was struck with Editha's plea, and had a talk with the abbot.

I learned that, as in the old days, two marriage ceremonies were customary, at intervals of a few weeks, the first, the betrothal, however, was considered valid and sufficing for every purpose. And so, since this was law in Rangarok, and hence would be recognized in all countries, Editha and I were married very quietly, an hour later, in the cathedral, in the presence only of Theobald, Bjorn, and Sweyn, and a few chosen friends, including the faithful Egbert, who was to accompany the expedition as my servant.

Here I might mention that Egbert, being only half Troll, had cast in his lot with us; and, indeed, many of the little folks already had been baptized and discarded the old, cruel faith forever.

So I bade Editha farewell at the palace door, since we were to leave before daybreak, and it was necessary to get all the sleep possible. We started at dawn, in a bitter snow-storm, and by the next morning reached the shore, where we found our fleet drawn up in the harbor.

The prospect was discouraging in the extreme. The pack ice, driven southward by the gales, was now invisible, and all about us foamed a turbulent sea, which made even embarkation hazardous.

However, by noon all was in readiness. Our plan was to skirt the coast, following a well-marked route, mostly well within sight of land, until, after two days, we reached the archipelago in which Harald was wont to foray.

Bjorn took command of the king's boat, a lengthy craft with two masts, having a gilt dolphin on the prow, and manned by a hundred oarsmen. I was in charge of one of the columns of ten ships, Sweyn having the other, while Bjorn was to lead his ten as the van.

The plan was to break Harald's formation by bearing down in three parallel lines; after that it would be each ship for herself, in the ancient fashion of Danish warfare.

Rather solemnly, since we should not see each other face to face again until after the fight—if then—Bjorn, Sweyn, and I bade one another farewell. But as Bjorn was entering his boat Sweyn turned to me and said

"At Dreenadel, our sally-port, Bjorn holds a surprise for you, Eric."

He said no more than that, and at the time I paid scant attention to his words.

For all my attention was concentrated upon the ten ships which I commanded nominally, of course, since I knew little of sea-fighting. Even my own twenty oarsmen were men from the maritime districts, whom I had never seen, as well as half my fighting force of fifty archers and swordsmen.

And, indeed, while most of these were veterans, accustomed to sea warfare, there were several youths, obviously unfit for service, more than one of whom was soon taken with the qualms of sea-sickness as we pursued our way through the heaving waters

With Bjorn's ten ships abreast in line, and Sweyn's following, and mine bringing up the rear—a straggling formation, much broken up by wind and sea—we left the port behind and started on our course toward Harald's stronghold.

And all that day we tossed and tumbled in the seas, rounding bleak headland after headland, until, at nightfall, which was early afternoon, we left the shore on our lee, and passed into tranquil waters, stilled by the protection of the ice-pack to the west of us.

All the day I had been busy exercising the men and making preparations. Toward midnight I went below for a brief sleep.

I had instructed Egbert to arouse me when Sirius rose, which would be, in that latitude, in early morning. When he awakened me I saw him standing looking very wistfully at me.

"What is it, Egbert?" I asked him.

"My lord remembers that first meeting of ours in the strange city ruled by the witan?"

"Aye, Egbert."

"And how his servant told him that he should forebear to follow what his heart urged him, for through it there would come bitter sorrows? Doth my lord remember now?"

"I remember, Egbert."

"Hath my lord felt them?"

"Deep sorrow and great joy," I answered.

"Yea, I have given my lord that which was destined for him. Now my task is all but accomplished, and the long journey to witanland was not made in vain. But if my lord win free through this battle, wherein great surprises await him, let him not return to Rangarok."

"Why not?" I asked in wonder.

The dwarf shook his head, pursing up his lips in the strange manner of the Trolls.

"In adversity," he said, "a king is as a brother. In prosperity, beware of him, for even a brother thirsteth for power and will bear no rival. Let my lord therefore make his way straight back to his own land, and see Rangarok no more."

"You speak foolishly, Egbert," I answered. "Shall I leave the Lady Editha in Rangarok?"

"Yea, my lord," he answered.

And my question, which I had meant as purely rhetorical, he answered as if from knowledge. I felt a growing alarm.

"You mean that I shall never return to her, Egbert?" I cried.

"I said not that, my lord, but that you will not return to Rangarok till you have returned to your own country."

And that was all I could get out of him.

Soon after I went on deck, and we maneuvered through hours of darkness until, about ten in the morning, the dim twilight disclosed the open sea without a sign of land, or of Bjorn's or Sweyn's ships.

I called my navigator, an old Anglian sailor, and questioned him, but he made light of the matter.

"Within two hours," he said, "we shall sight the rim of the peninsula that divides this sea into two halves. There are two courses, on either side of it, uniting again beyond, where the archipelago begins. Doubtless the other vessels have taken the starboard course, and we shall find them awaiting us at Dreenadel, our destination, until which point is reached there is no danger of any attack."

Surely enough, about noon we saw land, and then, far to the starboard, I could make out the dim shapes of the other vessels, wallowing in the rising waves.

We lost them off the edge of the peninsula, and, since it would have meant delay to have altered our course, we took the lee side and drove on under an increasing gale.

Before darkness fell we were flying through the foaming waters, lashed by a bitter wind. I placed the men on half-hour watches, which was all they could endure without becoming frozen.

The hoar frost settled upon the decks and spars, and the waves that drove aboard over the high sides had lashes of steel.

The ponderous tiller, which was controllable against the fury of the wind only through its being set in a semicircular groove, with notches in which it could be locked, hardly responded to the touch. We were driving a course dangerously near the edge of the distant ice-pack to avoid the risk of going ashore, and the ships behind us trod almost on each other's heels to keep together.

There were no lights by which to guide our way—nothing but an occasional straggling star and that sense of the north that is inherent in old sailors. The navigator, wrapped in furs, sat all night beside the man at the tiller, directing him.

I myself took the tiller about midnight, dismissing the sailor who had been at it. He was a boy of about twenty years, one of those whom I had marked as useless for fighting purposes, and, as I looked at his slight form and heard his teeth chattering beneath the hood that almost covered his face, I ordered him sternly below for the remainder of the night.

He hesitated, and looked at me, as if about to speak.

"Go below!" I cried sharply. "Do you not understand an order?"

He turned and limped away. For two hours I kept the tiller, until there was no longer any sensation in my hands.

Then I yielded it to the navigator, and so the night passed, and at last the second sunrise disclosed the distant coast, and the open waters of the archipelago beyond the headland.

Here, where the water was calmer, we expected to find the two other divisions of the fleet. And, just beneath the promontory, I saw a little port—Dreenadel, as the navigator told me.

However, it was impossible to approach it, owing to the state of the sea. In fact the rounding of the headland was itself a perilous undertaking, for the winds buffeted us toward the shore, and, in the end, we almost grazed the last rocks before reaching open water.

And at Dreenadel was my surprise. For, as we passed within three cables' length of it, I saw, anchored snugly off shore, and apparently none the worse for her adventures, my yacht, the Editha.

But my wonder and joy were turned to horror in a moment, for, at the mast-heads, there hung two things which were hardly recognizable as human bodies, owing to the tight rawhide that encased them.

There was no need to wonder: they were the bodies of two of the mutineers.

I turned away, to find Egbert beside me.

"Our Lord Bjorn's gift to my Lord Eric," he said.

"How did the ship come here?" I demanded.

"Be it known," he answered, "that upon my lord's arrival orders were sent to the coast to make the fairway of the ice and discover by what means he had reached Rangarok.

"Thereupon this ship was found, disabled, they say, by the storms. And for a week and more these men were held, awaiting King Harald's pleasure.

"But when our Lord Bjorn ruled, he sent orders that they should die in the old fashion, because they mutinied against my lord. And this, too, is Bjorn's gift."

I shuddered in horror, Bjorn's nature was developing fast. Again I thought of Egbert's warning and prophecy that I should not return to Rangarok.

And I had no wish to do so, for the blood-stained city was fast becoming an abomination to me.

We rounded the point and, in the distance, saw a fleet of ships, drawn up in battle array, and making slowly toward a distant island.

It was impossible to decrease the distance between us, and the vessels were only dark spots against the sun; so we kept on our course

Gradually the haze lifted. The short day had broken with the promise of that fine, mild weather that sometimes comes in early winter even in those latitudes

Upon a distant cliff I could just discern something that looked like a squat lighthouse.

"Harald's stronghold!" said Egbert, who still stood by me, pointing toward it. "It is fortunate that the storm did not divide us, for it would be dangerous for our ten ships to be caught alone by Harald's fleet in these waters."

I thought so, too, and was resolved to take no risk. At the stroke of the gong the men-at-arms came tumbling up on deck, putting on their mail and helmets as they ran. The archers put new strings to their bows and began testing their arrows

The men with the grappling-irons took up their posts; the oarsmen began to divest themselves of their furs and, in their underclothes of warm wool, balanced themselves in their places on either side of the keelson, ready to respond to the calls of the navigator on deck.

By now the distant shore was plainly discernible, and Harald's tower, keeping guard above it. I was watching the ships anxiously.

It was impossible to discern their immediate objective as they tacked, but they seemed to be directing their course toward the castle without awaiting us.

Beside me the navigator and Egbert watched eagerly, too, and I heard excited comments from the archers grouped near us on the poop.

And I was sure that the same unspoken thought was running in their minds that ran in mine—suppose that these are Harald's ships!

But as the sun began the slow curve of his arc, to my relief the vessels, as if sighting us, put about and came toward us.

I counted the twenty. All had survived the storm, then. I could make out the leader, larger than the rest, which should contain Bjorn.

They came on, still black between us and the sun, keeping an even line, and gradually extending until they began to overlap us at the ends. They were about a mile and a half distant, I judged, but still not readily distinguishable on account of the haze that rolled up from the surface of the ocean, when suddenly the navigator shouted, ran forward on the poop, and stood with his hand shading his eyes, at the same time peering out across the sea, his body bent forward, his whole attitude tense as a bulldog's.

At the same moment Egbert, at my side, gave a shrill shriek and danced in dismay, waving his long arms frantically over his body, and pointing to the oncoming ships.

"Harald's war-fleet!" he shouted.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE BATTLE OF THE SHIPS.

AT once the archers took their stations, and the men-at-arms withdrew to their posts behind the pent-house that protected them from hostile missiles, till they were needed in the fight. Meanwhile, I issued orders to put about and attempt to make the other side of the peninsula, in order to meet Bjorn's ships.

The vessel curved round in a wash of foam, those behind us, not at first understanding the maneuver, straggling out to starboard and lee of us, and losing all formation. And they never made it again.

For we were setting against the wind, while Harald's ships came on with the wind behind them, their full sails swelling and their bows cutting clean through the waves. It was soon manifest that unless Bjorn was already at hand we should never make the other channel

With our flank turned toward Harald, we offered the position of the greatest possible area to his fire. It did not take me long to see that our only hope was to maintain our fighting formation and await Bjorn's coming, rather than attempt to join him.

We had five signal-flags, and I hoisted the one ordering full speed ahead in line. But our ships were tumbling and wallowing

all about us, and Harald's were now less than a mile away, coming on in an encircling formation, the best for the archers, and already on three side of us.

The wind was increasing again, it was beginning to snow, and there was a steady drift of the pack-ice toward us. The advance floes were already grating beneath our keels.

I looked alternately across the headland, already disappearing in the sea-fog, and toward Harald's ships.

"My lord," said a voice beside me timidly.

I looked, to see the boy whom I had ordered from the wheel.

"You cannot fight," I said to him sternly, noting that the armor which he had put on was loose, and the straps twisted. "Go below and remain there!"

But he only grasped me by the arm.

"Steer straight for Harald's ship!" he cried. "If you sink him his men, who are dissatisfied with outlawry, may yield. It is the only chance!"

Sound sense! I looked at him for a moment curiously, but he had hurried away to obey my order, and I gave the order to the navigator.

Already Harald was within a half-knot of us. Through the murk I could discern his vessel clearly. It was larger than Bjorn's, that is to say, perhaps twice the size of mine.

The rowers were pulling in perfect unison, and the added momentum sent the great vessel dashing through the water toward mine, and at about twice the speed. A dragon, with throat agape, grinned on his prow

Now I could make out Harald himself, in his coat of linked steel, grasping his great two-handed sword and waving it aloft toward us.

Behind him stood his men at-arms, dauntlessly exposing themselves. Behind them, on a raised platform, were his archers

There was no chance to maneuver. Straight toward the oncoming ship we drove, and, at my command, my bowmen loosed their arrors.

The flight struck truly, and a dozen of Harald's men toppled to the decks. But Harald was uninjured, and I heard his deep-throated roar as the ships dashed toward each other.

At the same time a cloud of arrows came from Harald's ship, and from the ship on either side of us, now closing in. Half my men were gone in an instant, dyeing the deck with their blood.

A dart quivered in my wrist. I plucked it out, not feeling the pain, and saw the boy standing at my side once more

And suddenly I gave a great gasp of dismay, for he had thrown back his hood, and I recognized—Editha!

I cried out, all unnerved for the fight. I drew her to me, and for a moment she nestled in my arms. She raised her head.

"Forgive me, Eric!" she whispered. "I could not stay without thee. Egbert brought me, in the guise of a man-at-arms."

And now I knew what the dwarf had meant by the great surprises of which he had spoken.

Then, as we stood there together, with the arrows flying round us, I gathered all my wits and thrust Editha behind the pent-house.

The ships crashed together.

Our prow glanced off the heavy walls of Harald's, but his struck us fairly, and instantly I was swept off my feet by the force of the blow.

The ship careened over. There was a rush of water all about me.

"Grapple and board!"

I shouted the order above the din of the clashing swordsmen.

The grappling-irons were flung, but Harald's men were already aboard us, and the grapplers were cut down.

I saw the ex-king above me, rushing on at the head of his mail-clad men. He passed over me.

I stretched out my arms and found Editha.

I rose, holding her. Midships our men were resisting, and Harald, like a fury, was sweeping his great sword about his head, and hardly yielding place to his own followers.

Although I did not consciously observe it, I remembered afterward seeing our nine

other ships scudding in all directions, each with a brace of Harald's bulldogs at her heels. And then I saw Bjorn's fleet, just rounding the point of the peninsula by the other channel

Harald's men were shouting.

"Back, my lord!" they cried. "We are sinking!"

I heard the cries above the noise of battle. We were foundering under the seas that poured through the gap in our sides. Grating against us, held by the iron grappling-hooks, Harald's ship plunged like a tied and frightened horse.

Of all our men not one remained to oppose Harald's, though many wounded lay about the decks. Turning, Harald saw me with Editha, and, snorting with rage, rushed toward us.

I parried his first blow. The second struck the sword from my hand.

Harald raised his for the third stroke, aiming it at my head. Then something like a great dog ran between his legs and tripped him.

It was the dwarf, Egbert, and, as Harald went down, he ran to his side, shouting in his ear.

Harald rose slowly, glaring wildly at us, his sword raised undecidedly. One of his men thrust; his sword went home into the dwarf's body, and the wise little old man tumbled to my feet.

"Farewell, my lord! Thus I have served you!" he whimpered, and stiffened out like a great hound, and died.

I was waist-deep in water. If Harald hesitated out of uncertainty of mind, whether to cut me down or not, the sinking ship was his answer

He bellowed to his men, and, catching Editha in his arms, leaped to his own deck, while two of his swordsmen seized me and almost hurled me aboard

Hardly had we gained Harald's ship when mine turned over and sank immediately, carrying down her freight of dead

And now I saw our scattered, helpless ships, some tossing helpless upon the waves, some sinking, while on all sides Harald's rode the waves triumphantly.

Then for the first time Harald became aware of the approach of Bjorn's vessels. I watched them as they came on in a sort of apathy. They were outnumbered, and it was useless to match anything but equal numbers against the Dane's force of seasoned sea-fighters.

In fact, though Bjorn had expected to meet Harald on sea, the large force of three thousand had been for the purpose of assuring incontestable superiority by land, if we should be fortunate enough to be able to make our landing on Harald's island without encountering opposition.

Leaving Editha and myself for the moment, Harald bellowed an order, and at once his men were scurrying to and fro, signaling to his vessels. The great ship put slowly about, turning to meet Bjorn, while his fleet, with more alacrity than mine had shown, began falling into line.

Bjorn was about three miles away, and the short day was drawing to a close. And now I perceived that, while we had fought, the ice had been closing in about us.

There was a space of clear water for perhaps a mile behind us, and in front of us was open sea; but the floes, drifting in along shore, were threatening to cut off Harald's retreat.

And I noticed now that Bjorn, instead of continuing to bear down on us, was directing his course toward the coast, with the evident object of cutting off Harald and assaulting his stronghold, with the ice barrier behind him.

Harald saw his danger, and put about once more. Now the Danish ships were racing toward the shore, gradually approaching Bjorn's at an angle; and it was impossible to hazard which would be the first to arrive.

Harald came back to us. His eyes were alight with triumph, his lips were wolfish.

"Hail, Eric the Stranger!" he shouted in bitter mirth. "Hadst thou not wits enough to keep thy head out of the bear's mouth, thou who didst refuse to rule under me, and perchance after me?"

I did not answer him, but held Editha more closely, counting each moment with her as the most precious of all things.

"Why didst thou serve Bjorn, once thine own servant, and wouldst not serve me?" he demanded.

"It matters nothing, O Harald," I answered. "Do with me now as you will."

"Aye, as I served Ralph the traitor!" he roared. "It is not good for traitors to play false with Harald."

He glared and frowned at me, looking from me to Editha, and playing with his sword. Suddenly he burst out:

"By Odin, still I know not what to make of thee. Thou dost not plead for life?"

"No; there are greater boons," I said.

He clapped his great hand on my shoulder with the gesture of one who has suddenly made up his mind.

"Hark, Eric!" he roared in my ear. "I have no grudge against thee, for the bitterness I felt when thou didst overcome me in the lists hath passed away with this victory of mine.

"I do not understand thee, Eric, for thou has beaten me in one fair fight, and yet art neither seaman nor soldier; what manner of man thou art, with thy high soul and low bearing, I cannot discern.

"Yet the matter is a simple one: thou must die, and speedily, for reasons of statecraft, since I can neither bind thee to me nor be sure that thou wilt not supplant me.

"Therefore, bid farewell to this lady of mine, who hath followed thee in love. Of that I make nothing, since women are lighter than water, and soon she shall be mine.

"Be with her for an hour, and then prepare to die by Harald's sword. Before Bjorn come upon me, thou shalt taste death —an honorable death; giving thee entrance to the Valhalla of heroes.

"And there, perchance, Harald shall join thee when his day is done, and have the leisure to understand thee. For I love thee, Eric, as a man might love his brother."

There was something touching and chivalrous in the old lion's words.

Harald left me with Editha upon the deck, and strode off to command his men; but for long I could not bring myself to speak to her, and only held her to me, while the wintry day drew to its close, and the scene about me stamped itself upon my brain with the greater clarity in that my observance of it was wholly a subconscious one.

The floes were all about us. We were gradually approaching Bjorn's fleet on our diagonal courses, but his leading vessel was still as much as a mile away, and it was a dubious, three-sided race for vantage between Harald, Bjorn, and the ice.

The pack was moving along shore both from the island channel, which came into view behind Harald's castle, and from the ocean. Bjorn and Harald were each racing to make the open passage to the land before these two armies of ice-floes came together.

At first I thought the luck would be with Harald. But, in spite of the old pirate's seamanship, seen in the splendid laying of his course, Bjorn had the advantage of position.

Our ships were now in line, as his were, but we were half a mile behind him as his own ship took the channel, shot through the black water, and glided into the calm sea beyond.

Ship after ship, Bjorn's fleet followed. I saw Harald rage in despair as Bjorn went through; and, as the last of Bjorn's ships took the fairway, along a passage now hardly wider than a canal, and not more than two hundred feet ahead, he seized a bow from a bowman and loosed a shaft.

It fell short and hissed into the sea, and Bjorn's last ship joined her companions in the harbor of Harald's island.

I saw fear upon the faces of Harald's men. I knew the omen of the short shot — the worst that could have befallen.

Harald's situation was now a desperate one. Either he must drive through the fairway the few ships that could make the passage before the ice closed, and give battle with half his forces, at a disadvantage, or he must remain cut off from his own territory and see his stronghold taken and his lands ravaged and plundered.

He chose the former course. He took the tiller from the man who held it, and drove hard for the narrowing passage.

The ice walls drew together. For a moment the ship heaved and rocked in the struggle; and then, with a shock that thrilled her timbers, she struck.

The floes caught her and held her. The passage closed

Looking back I saw that the ice was

closing fast about the other ships of Harald's squadron as well.

And the ice-army that drifted in from the sea was flinging out a long line of skirmishers between Bjorn and the shore. In fact, both fleets were caught, and the advantage was not one of position, but of fighting men

In spite of the destruction of my squadron, Bjorn still had the greater numbers but I had little doubt that Harald's prowess and that of his veterans would win the day

Bjorn and Sweyn had realized the situation, and already their men were leaping over the sides of their ships upon the rocking ice, which, even as I watched, grew firm as solid ground beneath their feet

Harald's men, needing no order, trained as they were in many an encounter of this nature, were also clambering over their ships' sides and gathering for the fray.

It would be a short and bloody one, I thought, for it was already twilight; but I should not know the issue. Harald was coming back toward me, and I knew that my end was at hand

"Editha, dear," I said, "this was fated from the first, and this is the end. I loved thee. Think of that always.

"Better if I had never seen thee, but remember that. Promise me this: wed Harald if he wins, for win he must.

"Rule him, and, through him, rule those under him. And wipe away this bloodshed from the land. Promise me!"

I stretched out my hands to her in the impassioned appeal of a man about to die. I saw Harald halt a few feet distant.

He seemed to be struggling with himself, I believed he hated the task to which he had set himself, but it was not likely the old ruler would let a passing fancy stand between himself and his policy.

I saw him unsheath his sword. I saw the Danes about him, looking on with wonder at the strange spectacle of their king hesitating to despatch a victim.

I do not know what answer Editha would have made to my appeal. I have never asked her; I do not want to know.

For, while she waited, as I stood before her with my hands outstretched, I saw a look of amazement, wonder, fear come upon Harald's face. He strode toward me, and seized my hand in his sword-hand.

"Where didst thou get that ring?" he thundered

It was my mother's ring—gold, with a single ruby, with the name of Leontieff engraved on it in Russian characters. Since my mother's death it had never left my finger.

"It was my mother's," I told him.

"Where is she?"

"Dead—happily dead," I said, overcome by the remembrance of her.

He grasped me by the shoulders, staring into my face as if he would devour it, scanning my every feature. A groan broke from his lips. He let my hands fall.

"Would to God I had known before! Thank God I know now!" he moaned. "I am thy father, Alexei Leontieff!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BJORN RULES IN RANGAROK.

ONLY his bodyguard now remained about him. His swordsmen and the archers had already taken up their position, and, five hundred feet away, Bjorn was marshaling the last ranks of his men.

Everything was in readiness for that last, murderous battle in the dark, so useless, yet inevitable. Already the archers on either side were testing the distance by random shots toward each other.

But Harald leaped from his ship like a madman and broke through his fighting ranks. He strode in front of them.

"Come hither, Bjorn, and parley!" he shouted

Bjorn strode toward him, his mail clanking about him.

"Aye, I know thee, old fox!" he called. "There can be no parley with such as thee. Before the moon rises there shall be one king, not two, over Rangarok."

"Let it be thou, Bjorn!" answered Harald

"As thou sayest," said Bjorn, turning.

"I yield me, Bjorn!"

Bjorn's voice was keen with sarcasm as he replied:

"Harald Deerfoot they called thee in olden time, but Harald the Fox is what the common people say to-day, for truly, Harald, craft and not prowess, wins thee thy victories. Here is no council-chamber, but a fair field for valor to be tested!"

"Come hither, O Eric, my son, and speak with Bjorn for me," cried the old Dane to me.

I hastened to obey him, and, at the sight of me, whom he had believed dead, Bjorn started. I saw Sweyn stride forward from his men and come to Bjorn's side.

"If this be Eric," called Bjorn to Harald, "let him advance with thee and speak with me."

So we two went forward and, at a distance of twenty paces, Harald unsheathed his sword and cast it behind him, in the Danish manner

Bjorn and Sweyn did likewise; then, recognizing me, Sweyn ran forward and took my hands in a firm clasp that moved me deeply.

"What sayest thou, Harald?" asked Bjorn.

"This is my son, O Bjorn," said the old king. "Long have I dreamed of such a one to rule after me. Now let us make a treaty, that there be no more fighting, and thou shalt rule in Rangarok, and I in my dominions. And after thee, let Eric come to the crown."

"Fair words, Harald, but what of thee?" asked Bjorn.

As they spoke the men on either side, overcome with curiosity at the strange sight, and having heard Harald's offer to yield, had gradually pressed forward until they now stood in a circle about us. Their ranks intermingled

And because there was no enmity among them, and many were kin, and almost all knew each other; and because Harald's outlaws sought gladly the chance to yield, in a few moments Bjorn had gained a bloodless victory, for Harald's forces had already begun to merge themselves with Bjorn's.

Before Harald could answer, he had appraised the situation

"Freedom for my men," he answered

"Aye, but of thee I asked," said Bjorn.

"I am content to rule in my island. I am weary of war, Bjorn. For the sight of my son, and the remembrance of other days unnerves me"

"Aye, Harald, but already the strength thou hadst is gone, and it is for me, and not for thee, to make the terms of peace."

And Harald looked about him, to see himself surrounded by Bjorn's swordsmen.

"Then let me die fighting!" he roared, groping for his sword in the empty scabbard

"Nay, why should more lives be taken?" asked Bjorn quietly.

He made a motion with his hand, and a dozen men flung themselves upon the old king. Harald made no resistance. Within a few minutes he was a captive in Bjorn's ship, and Harald's own vessels were in our hands

It was a bitter argument that arose later about the council-table in Bjorn's vessel, Sweyn pleading for Harald, together with myself, and Bjorn obstinately opposing.

"Enough blood has been shed," said Sweyn.

"Aye, Sweyn. But more will be shed unless he dies. The old fox may be stirred by the discovery of his son.

"A life of war and plunder leaves little taste for quiet rule. And what is in the blood must come out in the blood!"

He glanced askance at me as he spoke, and with dismay I realized that his suspicions were already turning against me

So we talked to and fro, Bjorn growing more obstinate, and yet, I could see, reluctant to execute his own decision. And then our argument was interrupted by the appearance of Editha.

She had asked and received permission to visit Harald, and now came quietly up to the table

"Listen to a woman's words, my Lord Bjorn," she said. "It hath been in my mind to crave this boon that Eric and I shall not return to Rangarok, but shall take ship at Dreenadel, aboard his own vessel, and leave for the land in which he dwells.

"Let Harald come with us, for it is his wish to return to the land from which he came. Thus his death may be averted, and there shall be no more bloodshed."

"What sayest thou, Eric?" asked Bjorn.

"I am willing," I answered.

"Let it be so," he answered. But I knew that Bjorn would never yield to any man's will again, once his kingship was firmly established.

And I knew that it was the thought of disposing of two rival claimants to the throne—Editha and myself—rather than of mercy, which inspired his decision.

So, two days later, when a change of wind opened the iceway, we set sail for Dreenadel. There, having cut down the ghastly trophies at the mast-heads, and given them reverent burial, Editha and I and Harald took ship, manned by three of Bjorn's most skilful seamen.

They were to convey us, under sail, through the ice passage to within sight of the most northern port of call in Norway, returning in one of their long-boats, which we carried on board.

Bjorn softened toward the end, as he bade farewell to us upon the deck of the Editha.

"A strange journey, Eric, my friend," he said, "with an unexpected ending. Nevertheless, believe that the Norns willed this. Be happy with her for whom thou didst come, and forget Rangarok.

"Let Harald forget, too, for, if he set foot upon our shores again, surely he shall pay the penalty with his life."

Sweyn embraced me. "Come back some day, Eric," he whispered in my ear. "Surely I shall not die without seeing thee again!"

"Some day—perhaps, O Sweyn," I answered.

And my eyes were full of tears as I stood beside Editha upon the deck and watched the receding shore.

We made the passage of the ice and entered the Arctic Sea, speeding southward with a favorable wind.

Those days were the happiest of all my life. Each hour with Editha was a revelation to me. I had never known a woman's companionship since my mother's death, and I had never known what I had missed.

We talked a great deal about our plans. At first it seemed to me that Editha would never be able to adjust herself to modern life; but, since human nature is everywhere the same, I came to realize that it was only the externals of life that would demand adjustment.

I resolved to settle for a while in some small place on the outskirts of civilization—perhaps in the Northwest—while Editha learned modern English and picked up the ways of the people. Thence the transition would be comparatively easy.

Harald approved this plan. We talked a great deal of the future. Since Russia was no longer his home—indeed, during his years in Rangarok he had almost forgotten his native tongue we decided he should live with us for the remainder of his days.

He told me things about my mother, too, that almost made me forget the wrong he had done her.

But still I wondered whether, after the wild life in Rangarok, he would be able to adjust himself to our civilization.

It was on the third night of our voyage. Leontieff — as he was to be called — was pacing the deck with me, and we had talked for hours of the future.

"Eric," he said, "I have not found you to lose you again. We will make our home together, and I shall try to atone for the wrongs I have done you and those over whom I ruled.

"The past seems like a dream to me—a feverish dream, sometimes, but, nevertheless, a nightmare, out of which I have awakened.

"I am going to spend the night on deck and fight it out, as a man must fight with the wild beasts of his past. Good night, and God bless you!"

Those were the last words I heard from his lips, for I was aroused at dawn by one of our seamen, who drew me on deck, shouting incoherently and pointing.

The long-boat was gone. Leontieff was gone, with the two others. The sun shone over a wilderness of water, but nowhere was there any sign of a boat upon it.

For at last, the ties of a lifetime had proved too strong to be broken; and Harald had gone back to Rangarok to fight for his empire.

**(The End.)**

# On the Editorial Carpet

GOOD news!

The author of "Lem and I on the Ypres War Run," "The Emblem on the Whistling Post," and many another yarn that has delighted and thrilled our readers has written another story.

Better news!

It's a railroad novelette—one of the very best that we have ever published.

Best news of all!

The complete novelette will appear in next week's issue—the Christmas stocking issue of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE. First thing when you open the big, red book look for

## THE STOP THIS SIDE ETERNITY.

### BY HORACE HOWARD HERR.

We needn't introduce Mr. Herr to our readers. They know him. His latest story is right up to the very high standard that he has set for himself. There is a thrill on every page—a laugh in every line.

After Christmas dinner, when the old brier is drawing sweet, and you start to read about the many things that happened to *Hogger Dave Kendall* when— Oh, boy! Some Christmas treat!

THEN there's a story about a colored gentleman, who puts in his spare time firing a locomotive down in the land of cotton and watermelons, and who fell sure-enough in love with a gorgeous automobile—and what happened—which was plenty. When H. Keith Trask wrote "Purple and Gold" he "did something." Read it in next week's issue, and you'll agree with us.

SAY what you will, there's a fascination about the prize-ring and the doings of the modern gladiators who battle therein. And many a humorous incident is a by-product of this same squared circle. Next week Samuel G. Camp will entertain you with a mighty funny story about the scrappers and their ways. "Work or Fight" is the title. You'll enjoy reading it.

AUSTIN IRBY, in addition to thousands of telegraphic friends among the readers of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, has made another invention. It worked—perhaps too well. Anyhow, there's a laugh in the next story of the series—"Fat Heads." This time Mr. MacMahon has so much to say about the Child Telegrapher of the Pittsburgh-West Division that it will have to go to you in two sections. The first is scheduled for next week's issue, and the second will follow in the issue of December 28.

THE Queen and Crescent Route is no more, but its memory sticks in the minds of Southern rails—and of some Northern rails who have "traveled." Next week our good old friend, "J. E. M." will have a few words to say about old times on that particular stretch of track. They are well worth reading.

CIRCUS RED is another good old-timer who is always welcome to our readers. "Red Falls for the Strong Woman" is the title of next week's big-top adventure. Mr. Seymour certainly "spread himself" in writing it. Just a suggestion—laughing aids digestion. Save this particular story for after dinner!

WE'VE heard it whispered that rails are superstitious. At any rate, J. W. Earp tells of a conductor who was. "Superstitious William" is the marking on this consignment of railroad comedy. Read it!

"THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN THE CITY," by Octavus Roy Cohen, is a story of a girl who had that distinction thrust upon her by a keen business man—and of the big surprise that was coming to same keen business man. You'll like it!

INSTALMENTS of three fine serials, the Telegraphic and Telephonic Department, and several short stories that you'll enjoy reading fill up the Christmas stocking issue of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE from toe to top. It will interest every rail, from call-boy to general manager.

AND when you open it, Mr. Rail and Mrs. Rail, and all the little Rails, remember that the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE wishes you, every one, a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS.

# SNATCHED FROM THE MAIL-CRANE.

IF you ever had any mistaken notion that the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE was for men exclusively—forget it. The women, especially the women rails—of whom there are plenty these days—like it just as well as the men do. Here's a very interesting and appreciative letter from a woman brass-pounder, who used to hold down the "graveyard trick" at a little tank station away out in the desert. She's in the "high carpet" (general offices) now, but she's actually home-sick for the sight of cactus and mesquite, and for the coyotes, rattlesnakes, horned toads, and blistering, baking sun of New Mexico and Arizona. Can you beat it? But, as the late Josh Billings said, "Wimmin is cur'ous critters."

IF I may be permitted to say it, I noticed by the letter of Mr. Harvey Grofe, which appeared upon the Editorial Carpet under date of November 2, that he apparently overlooked Mr. C. W. Tyler's wonderful writings when he mentioned a few of the other most interesting of brass-pounders' yarns. Mr. Tyler's stories, such as "On the Graveyard Trick," "At Mile-Post 104," "At Mile-Post 87," and "When 6 passed Summit Spur," are truly the most interesting stories that have ever been published in any magazine.

I have been on the "graveyard trick" myself, and must say I certainly enjoyed it while it lasted, and even if I had to fight hard to keep the "real-estate agent" (sandman) from relieving me in the wee sma' hours. But no matter how lonesome or scary Mr. Tyler may choose to paint the life of the lonely "OS op," or how much it may cause that swelling in the steam-chest, or the choking sensation in the throttle of any true rail, please, Mr. Editor, for the love of Mike, and for the sake of us "lightning-slingers," please do not fire Mr. Tyler at any cost, but keep him right on the job, as he is certainly one fine writer. He has not as yet been successful enough to shake my faith and interest in railroading, nor to wreck my love for the lonely "OS" stations, the coyotes, train-robbers, and rattlesnakes of New Mexico and Arizona.

All of these stations put together are not a fraction as lonesome as is the "High Carpet" right here in this city. Although I like it here, yet I find these little sun-baked stations beautiful and interesting, and, believe me, I would be only too glad to exchange my job so near the Presidential chair for the graveyard trick in the little Mexican freight-car stations, with all of the above-named pets included, if I only could.

Three cheers for the dear old RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, our new weekly visitor. Long may it live and prosper!

MISS S. PRESCHER.

San Francisco, California.

LOTS of the old-timers had their names temporarily on the pay-roll of the "Ho Jack" during their booming days, and all of them seem to cherish rather tender memories of the old "cow-path," in spite of the fact that it was a notoriously tough pike to work on. Here's a letter from one of them, now retired and living in Canada:

As I am an old ex-rail of the Ho Jack, I must have your magazine, for it brings back to life some of the good times, and also some of the tough times, I put in on the old cow-path, or Ho Jack, as it was well-named. But I guess it is better now.

Keep the *Boomer Jones* pot boiling. I used to have a friend who was just like *Boomer*. We called him Judas Priest Johnson, and that kid was sure some tallow-pot. But he had to be to hold down a job on the Ho Jack, for the hogs on that pike were nothing more than piles of old scrap-iron, and required a tremendous amount of expert persuading to make them consent to go.

A. W. ELMHURST.

Harris, Saskatchewan, Canada.

# "Why I Chose a Brunswick"

By BURTON WYNNE

## Adventures in Seeking the Super-Phonograph

FOR years my family has wanted a phonograph. Yet we hesitated. We were on the verge of buying often, but delayed.

We love music. And we value the phonograph for the wealth of world-wide talent it brings to the home.

But frankly, we waited during the last few years, hearing the different phonographs and weighing their different advantages — never quite satisfied.

We felt that sooner or later a better phonograph would come, overcoming all the current handicaps and setting new standards.

We never liked the idea of a phonograph which would play only its own make of records. No one catalog contained all our favorites. Each line of records offered its attractions.

Another thing we quarrelled with was tone. We were repelled at the strident tones of some. And others seemed to be nearly perfect, but not quite.

I realize that all this sounds like we were too critical and that we set ourselves above the thousands who were content with the phonographs we hesitated to buy.

But we wanted to be sure before we bought, so as to avoid regrets.

In our determination to find the super-phonograph, we came upon the new Brunswick. It was announced as something different, something advanced.

We read and heard of the Brunswick Method of Reproduction, which included the Ultona and an improved amplifier.

And so we investigated. We were somewhat skeptical — but we came away as proud owners.

For here, at last, was our ideal instrument—one which played all records at their best, one with incomparable tone.

This remarkable instrument ended our search. We found in the Brunswick Method of Reproduction all we had looked for and more.

The Ultona is a simple, convenient, all-record player, adjustable to any type of record at a turn of the hand. And now we buy our records according to artists rather than make. Thus we overcome the old-time limitations.

I am convinced that the tone of The Brunswick is far superior, and due chiefly to the strict observance of acoustic laws.

The tone amplifier is built entirely of wood, molded so as to give the sound waves full opportunity to develop. No metal is used in this amplifier, so there are no stunted, metallic sounds.

My advice to every music lover is to hear The Brunswick before deciding. One's ear immediately appreciates the difference. And old conceptions of the phonograph are changed.

Brunswick dealers everywhere are delighted to play the new Brunswick for you and to explain its betterments.

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